William Shakespeare

The Tragedy of KING LEAR

H. K. Girling, *Introduction* / Lucy M. Fitzpatrick, *Notes*

William Shakespeare

TO THE READER

THIS FIGURE, THAT THOU HERE SEEST PUT,
IT WAS FOR GENTLE SHAKESPEARE CUT;
WHEREIN THE GRAVER HAD A STRIFE
WITH NATURE, TO OUT-DO THE LIFE:
O, COULD HE BUT HAVE DRAWN HIS WIT
AS WELL IN BRASS, AS HE HATH HIT
HIS FACE; THE PRINT WOULD THEN SURPASS
ALL, THAT WAS EVER WRIT IN BRASS.
BUT, SINCE HE CANNOT, READER, LOOK,
NOT ON HIS PICTURE, BUT HIS BOOK.

BEN: JONSON.

The Mediaeval view of man was generally not an exalted one. It saw him as more or less depraved, fallen from Grace as a result of Adam's sin; and the things of this world as of little value in terms of his salvation. Natural life was thought of mainly as a preparation for man's entry into Eternity. But Renaissance thought soon began to rehabilitate man and nature. Without denying man's need for Grace, men came gradually to accept the idea that there were "goods," values, "innocent delights" to be had in the world here and now. Man himself was seen no longer as wholly vile and depraved, incapable even of desiring goodness, but rather as Shakespeare saw him in *Hamlet*:

> *"What a piece of work is man! How noble in reason!*
> *how infinite in faculty! in form and moving how*
> *express and admirable! in action how like an angel!*
> *in apprehension how like a god! the beauty of the world!*
> *the paragon of animals!"*

It was, indeed, a very stirring time to be alive in. It was a time like spring, when promise, opportunity, challenge, and growth appeared where none had been dreamed of before. Perhaps this is why there is so much poetry of springtime in the age of Shakespeare.

Edited with Introduction and Suggestions for Study by

Notes Edited by Lucy Mabry Fitzpatrick

AN AIRMONT CLASSIC

Published by Airmont Publishing Co., Inc.

AIRMONT SHAKESPEARE CLASSICS SERIES

Tragedy of KING LEAR

By

William Shakespeare

General Introduction by Dr. David G. Pitt

An Airmont Classic

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from the immortal literature of the world

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PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

William Shakespeare: His Life, Times, and Theatre

HIS LIFE

The world's greatest poet and playwright, often called the greatest Englishman, was born in Stratford-upon-Avon, Warwickshire, in the year 1564. The exact date of his birth is uncertain, but an entry in the *Stratford Parish Register* gives his baptismal date as April 26, and it is reasonable to assume that he was born on or about April 23—an appropriate day, being the feast of St. George, the patron saint of England.

His father, John Shakespeare, was a glover and dealer in wool and farm products, who had moved to Stratford from Snitterfield, four miles distant, some time before 1552. During his early years in Stratford his business prospered, enabling him to acquire substantial property, including several houses, and to take his place among the more considerable citizens of the town. In 1557 he married Mary, daughter of Robert Arden, a wealthy landowner of Wilmcote, not far from Stratford. Two daughters were born to them before William's birth—Joan, baptized in 1558, and Margaret, baptized in 1562—but both died in infancy. William was thus their third child, though the eldest of those who survived infancy. After him were born Gilbert (1566), another Joan (1569), Anne (1571), Richard (1574), and Edmund (1580).

Very little is positively known about Shakespeare's boyhood and education. We know that for some years after William's birth his father's rise in Stratford society and municipal affairs continued. Many local offices came to him in rapid succession: ale-taster, burgess (a kind of constable), assessor of fines, chamberlain (town treasurer), high bailiff (a kind of magistrate), alderman (town councilor), and chief alderman in 1571. As the son of a man of such eminence, Shakespeare undoubtedly attended the local Grammar School. This he was entitled to do free of charge, his father being a town councilor. We do not know how good a pupil he was nor what subjects he studied. It is probable that he covered the usual Elizabethan curriculum: an "A B C book," the catechism in Latin and English, Latin grammar, the translation of Latin authors, and perhaps some Greek grammar and translation as well. But family circumstances appear to have curtailed his formal education, for shortly before William

reached his fourteenth birthday his father's rising fortunes abruptly passed their zenith.

About the year 1578, having gone heavily into debt, John Shakespeare lost two large farms inherited by his wife from her father. Thereafter, he was involved in a series of lawsuits, and lost his post on the Stratford town council. Finally, in 1586, he was declared a bankrupt.

In 1582, Shakespeare married Anne, daughter of Richard Hathaway (recently deceased) of the village of Shottery near Stratford. The *Episcopal Register* for the Diocese of Worcester contains their marriage record, dated November 28, 1582; he was then in his eighteenth year and his wife in her twenty-sixth. On May 26 of the following year the *Stratford Parish Register* recorded the baptism of their first child, Susanna; and on February 2, 1585, the baptism of a twin son and daughter named Hamnet and Judith.

How Shakespeare supported his family, how long he continued to live in Stratford, we do not know for certain. Tradition and conjecture have bestowed on him many interim occupations between his marriage and his appearance in London in the early fifteen-nineties: printer, dyer, traveling-player, butcher, soldier, apothecary, thief. Perhaps only the last-named "pursuit" requires some explanation. According to several accounts, Shakespeare fell into bad company some time after his marriage, and on several occasions stole deer from the park of Sir Thomas Lucy, a substantial gentleman of Charlecote, near Stratford.

However he may have occupied himself in the interim, we know that by 1592 Shakespeare was already a budding actor and playwright in London. In that year Robert Greene in his autobiographical pamphlet *A Groatsworth of Wit*, referring to the young actors and menders of old plays who were, it seemed to him, gaining undeserved glory from the labours of their betters (both by acting their plays and by rewriting them), wrote as follows:

> Yes trust them not: for there is an upstart Crow, beautified with our feathers, that with his Tygers heart, wrapt in a Players hyde, supposes he is as well able to bombast out blanke verse as the best of you: and being an absolute *Johannes factotum*, is in his owne conceit the onely Shakescene in a countrey.

"Shakescene" is clearly Shakespeare. The phrase "upstart Crow" probably refers to his country origins and his lack of university education. "Beautified with our feathers" probably means that he uses the older playwrights' words for his own aggrandisement either in plays in which he acts or in those he writes himself. "Tygers heart wrapt in a Players hyde" is

a parody of a line in III *Henry VI*, one of the earliest plays ascribed to Shakespeare. And the Latin phrase *Johannes factotum*, meaning Jack-of-all-trades, suggests that he was at this time engaged in all sorts of theatrical jobs: actor, poet, playwright, and perhaps manager as well.

Greene died shortly after making this scurrilous attack on the young upstart from Stratford, and so escaped the resentment of those he had insulted. But Henry Chettle, who had prepared Greene's manuscript for the printer, in his *Kind-Harts Dreame* (1592), apologized to Shakespeare for his share in the offence:

> I am as sory as if the originall fault had beene my fault, because my selfe have seene his demeanor no lesse civill, than he excelent in the qualitie he professes: Besides, divers of worship have reported his uprightness of dealing, which argues honesty, and his facetious grace in writing, that approoves his Art.

Thus, because of an attack upon him by an irascible dying man, we learn that Shakespeare at this time was held in high regard by "divers of worship," that is, by many of high birth, as an upright, honest young man of pleasant manners and manifest skill as actor, poet, and playwright.

Although Shakespeare by 1593 had written, or written parts of, some five or six plays (I, II, and III *Henry VI*, *Richard III*, *The Comedy of Errors*, and perhaps *Titus Andronicus*), it was as a non-dramatic poet that he first appeared in print. *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece*, long narrative poems, both bearing Shakespeare's name, were published in 1593 and 1594 respectively. But thereafter for the next twenty years he wrote almost nothing but drama. In his early period, 1591 to 1596, in addition to the plays named above, he wrote *Love's Labour's Lost*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Richard II*, and *King John*. Then followed his great middle period, 1596 to 1600, during which he wrote both comedies and history-plays: *The Merchant of Venice*, I and II *Henry IV*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, *Much Ado about Nothing*, *Henry V*, *Julius Caesar*, *As You Like It*, and *Twelfth Night*. The period of his great tragedies and the so-called "dark comedies" followed (1600-1608): *Hamlet*, *Troilus and Cressida*, *All's Well that Ends Well*, *Measure for Measure*, *Othello*, *King Lear*, *Macbeth*, *Antony and Cleoptra*, *Timon of Athens*, and *Coriolanus*. The last phase of his career as dramatist, 1608 to 1613, sometimes called "the period of the romances," produced *Pericles*, *Prince of Tyre*, *Cymbeline*, *The Winter's Tale*, *The Tempest*, parts of *Henry VIII*, and per-

haps parts of *The Two Noble Kinsmen*. Long before his death in 1616 his name held such magic for the public that merely to print it on the title page of any play assured its popular acclaim. The "upstart Crow" had come a long way since 1592.

He had come a long way, too, from the economic straits that may well have driven him to London many years before. We know, for example, from the records of tax assessments that by 1596 Shakespeare was already fairly well-to-do. This is further borne out by his purchasing in the following year a substantial house known as New Place and an acre of land in Stratford for £60, a sizable sum in those days. In 1602 he made a further purchase of 107 acres at Stratford for £320, and a cottage and more land behind his estate at New Place. But his life during this time was not quite unclouded. His only son, Hamnet, died in 1596 at the age of eleven years, his father in 1601, and his mother in 1608. More happily he saw, in 1607, the marriage of his daughter Susanna to Dr. John Hall, an eminent physician of Stratford, and, in the following year, the baptism of his granddaughter, Elizabeth Hall.

Shakespeare's retirement to Stratford appears to have been gradual, but by 1613 he seems to have settled there, though he still went up to London occasionally. Of the last months of his life we know little. We do know that in February, 1616, his second daughter, Judith, married Thomas Quiney. We know that on March 25 Shakespeare revised and signed his will, among other bequests leaving to his wife his "second best bed with the furniture." A month later he was dead, dying on his fifty-second birthday, April 23, 1616. He was buried in the chancel of Holy Trinity Church, Stratford, on April 26.

HIS TIMES

Shakespeare lived during the English Renaissance, that age of transition that links the Mediaeval and the Modern world. Inheriting the rich traditions of the Middle Ages in art, learning, religion, and politics, rediscovering the great legacies of classical culture, the men of the Renaissance went on to new and magnificent achievements in every phase of human endeavor. No other period in history saw such varied and prolific development and expansion. And the reign of Elizabeth I (1558-1603), Shakespeare's age, was the High Renaissance in England.

The universe grew in immensity as men gradually abandoned the old Ptolemaic view of a finite, earth-centered universe, accepting the enormous intellectual challenge of the illimitable cosmos of Copernicus' theory and Galileo's tele-

scope. The earth enlarged, too, as more of its surface was discovered and charted by explorers following the lead of Columbus, Cabot, Magellan, and Vespucci. England itself expanded as explorers and colonizers, such as Frobisher, Davis, Gilbert, Raleigh, Grenville, Drake, and others, carried the English flag into many distant lands and seas; as English trade and commerce expanded with the opening of new markets and new sources of supply; as English sea power grew to protect the trading routes and fend off rivals, particularly Spain, the defeat of whose Invincible Armada in 1588 greatly advanced English national pride at home, and power and prestige abroad.

The world of ideas changed and expanded, too. The rediscovery and reinterpretation of the classics gave a new direction and impetus to secular education. During the Middle Ages theology had dominated education, but now the language, literature, and philosophy of the ancient world, the practical arts of grammar, logic, and rhetoric, and training in morals, manners, and gymnastics assumed the major roles in both school and university—in other words, an education that fitted one for life in the world here and now replaced one that looked rather to the life hereafter.

The Mediaeval view of man was generally not an exalted one. It saw him as more or less depraved, fallen from Grace as a result of Adam's sin; and the things of this world, which was also "fallen," as of little value in terms of his salvation. Natural life was thought of mainly as a preparation for man's entry into Eternity. But Renaissance thought soon began to rehabilitate man, nature, and the things of this life. Without denying man's need for Grace and the value of the means of salvation provided by the Church, men came gradually to accept the idea that there were "goods," values, "innocent delights" to be had in the world here and now, and that God had given them for man to enjoy. Man himself was seen no longer as wholly vile and depraved, incapable even of desiring goodness, but rather as Shakespeare saw him in *Hamlet:*

> What a piece of work is man! how noble in reason! how infinite in faculty! in form and moving how express and admirable! in action how like an angel! in apprehension how like a god! the beauty of the world! the paragon of animals!

And this is the conception of man that permeates Elizabethan thought and literature. It does not mean that man is incorruptible, immune to moral weakness and folly. Shakespeare has his villains, cowards, and fools. But Nature framed him for greatness, endowed him with vast capacities

for knowledge, achievement, and delight, and with aspirations that may take him to the stars. "O brave new world, That has such people in 't!"

HIS THEATRE

There were many theatres, or playhouses, in Shakespeare's London. The first was built in 1576 by James Burbage and was called the *Theatre*. It was built like an arena, with a movable platform at one end, and had no seats in the pit, but had benches in the galleries that surrounded it. It was built of wood, and cost about £200. Other famous playhouses of Shakespeare's time included the Curtain, the Bull, the Rose, the Swan, the Fortune, and, most famous of them all, the Globe. It was built in 1599 by the sons of James Burbage, and it was here that most of Shakespeare's plays were performed.

As its name suggests, the Globe was a circular structure (the second Globe, built in 1614 after the first burned down, was octagonal), and was open to the sky, somewhat like a modern football or baseball stadium, though much smaller. It had three tiers of galleries surrounding the central "yard" or pit, and a narrow roof over the top gallery. But most interesting from our viewpoint was the stage—or rather *stages*—which was very different from that of most modern theatres.

The main stage, or *apron* as it was called, jutted well out into the pit, and did not extend all the way across from side to side. There was an area on either side for patrons to sit or stand in, so that actors performing on the apron could be viewed from three sides instead of one. In addition, there was an inner stage, a narrow rectangular recess let into the wall behind the main stage. When not in use it could be closed by a curtain drawn across in front; when open it could be used for interior scenes, arbor scenes, tomb and anteroom scenes and the like. On either side of this inner stage were doors through which the main stage was entered. Besides the inner and outer stages, there were no fewer than four other areas where the action of the play, or parts of it, might be performed. Immediately above the inner stage, and corresponding to it in size and shape, was another room with its front exposed. This was used for upstairs scenes, or for storage when not otherwise in use. In front of this was a narrow railed gallery, which could be used for balcony scenes, or those requiring the walls of a castle or the ramparts of a fortress. On either side of it and on the same level was a window-stage, so-called because it consisted of a small balcony enclosed by windows that opened on hinges. This permitted actors to speak from the open windows to

others on the main stage below. In all, it was a very versatile multiple stage and gave the dramatist and producer much more freedom in staging than most modern theatres afford.

The dramatist's words and the imagination of the audience supplied the lack of scenery. No special lighting effects were possible since plays were performed in the daylight that streamed in through the unroofed top of the three-tiered enclosure that was the playhouse. Usually a few standard stage props were on hand: trestles and boards to form a table, benches and chairs, flagons, an altar, artificial trees, weapons, a man's severed head, and a few other items. Costumes were usually elaborate, though no attempt was made to reproduce the dress of the time and place portrayed in the play.

But we need have no doubts about the audience's response. They came, they saw, and the dramatist conquered, for they kept coming back for more and more. And despite the opposition that the theatre encountered from Puritans and others, who thought it the instrument of Satan, the theatre in Shakespeare's time flourished as one of the supreme glories of a glorious age.

—DAVID G. PITT
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INTRODUCTION TO

KING LEAR

A FIRST READING OF THE PLAY

No one can open the pages of *King Lear*, or see the beginning of a performance of the play, without a certain awe. Here is one of the greatest dramas in any language: how can anyone hope to measure himself against a tremendous theatrical experience that generations of playgoers and readers and critics have all found so overpowering? Though no stage performance can fail to convey something of the passion and the richness of Shakespeare's huge conception, anyone reading the play for the first time may feel that the large claims are exaggerated. Grotesque characters are mouthing barely comprehensible words and inflicting incredible barbarities upon each other. The French critic Émile Faguet summed up his distaste for such proceedings: "What have these ferocious beasts to say to me? Someone has opened a cage of wild animals, and that's all."

Every reader of *King Lear* is entitled to make up his own mind about the play. If he is prepared to regard it as an entertainment in a new medium he has not seen before—as new as films and television once were—he will pick up what is happening and being said as the play continues, and the unusual forms of the actions and the words will explain themselves. The special qualities of Shakespeare's medium may be stated quite directly, for they amount to the expectations of the playgoers who first saw *King Lear* performed in the Globe Theatre "on the Banksyde" in London in 1605, and of the nobles at the Court of King James I who saw a performance on December 26, 1606.

1. The play is acting out an episode in history, something that happened long ago in Britain.

2. The events in the story follow their own strange logic, rather in the way that each magical twist and turn in a fairy story follows a peculiar but not unfamiliar sequence.

3. The play is not a learned work to be slowly studied, but a piece of current entertainment striving to be popular.

4. The actors are not speaking and acting like story-tale people (as cavemen and knights in armor seem to us nowadays), but are presuming to represent figures like those whose mighty presence in the Court dominates London.

5. Poetry is regarded as the natural language for recounting important events. Just as someone with a sensitive musical ear can catch a song at a first hearing, so the audience expects to share the excitement and the sorrow in the play by responding to the poetry.

6. In a world where no one can look toward the future with much assurance, and where the truths of religion, though basically unquestioned, are torn between contesting sects, the audience believes that some meaning in the universe may be discovered by

the contemplation of large and alarming catastrophes in history: this is the justification for the presentation of tragedies on the stage.

THE BOOK AND THE PRODUCTION: SHAKESPEARE'S SOURCES AND SHAKESPEARE'S STAGE

Playwrights of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries did not try to spin tales out of their own imaginations, as we expect playwrights and novelists to do nowadays. Each writer assembled well-tested materials for his poem or his play; his originality made its impact through the way that his construction fitted episodes together, through the power of the poetry, and through the pathos or the amusement inspired by the incidents represented. The importance of *King Lear* lies in Shakespeare's own composing imagination, not in the origins of the story or of the characters he used; nevertheless, we may obtain a preliminary view of Shakespeare at work by a brief glance at his sources.

Shakespeare probably began with the idea of rewriting an older play that had been performed some years before, at the Rose Theatre in 1594, *The True Chronicle History of King Leir and his three Daughters, Gonorill, Ragan and Cordella.* He would want to write a good part for Richard Burbage, the chief actor in the company, and he gave him an opportunity for full-throated declamation by inventing the crucially important business of Lear's madness. Another important actor in the company was Robert Armin, who was scoring great successes in jesters' parts; for Armin, Shakespeare inserted the part of the Fool.

The chronicle play of *King Leir* dramatized in an ordinary episodic fashion a legend about an old king and his three daughters, two wicked and one good, that had long been current as a historical tale. The legend was first written down by a mediaeval chronicler, Geoffrey of Monmouth, from whom the Tudor chronicler Raphael Holinshed took it for his *Chronicles of England, Scotland and Irelande* (1578, 1587). Holinshed used the legend as if it were genuine history, and dated "Leir's" ascent to the throne "in the yeare of the world 3165, at what time Joas reigned in Juda." Shakespeare drew on Holinshed, principally for the first scene, though in Holinshed's account, as in all the versions of the legend other than Shakespeare's, the sad story has a happy ending.

No story about King Lear ever mentions the Duke of Gloucester and his sons. Shakespeare took the basis of Gloucester's story from the pathetic tale of the King of Paphlagonia, which appears in a chapter of Sir Philip Sidney's *Arcadia* (1590), a collection of stories and poems narrated and sung by a little group of shepherds and shepherdesses.

The year 1605 was a time for reflections upon catastrophe. London was recovering from the great plague of 1603, there were financial scandals and sensational murders, and the new Court of James I seemed noticeably corrupt in comparison with the Court of Queen Elizabeth, who had died in 1603. (See G. B. Harrison, *Shakespeare's Tragedies,* 1951.) Then on the Fifth of November, 1605, the Gunpowder Plot to blow up the King and

the House of Commons was discovered. The shock caused by the plot may be gauged by the fact that the memory of no other historical event has become so ingrained a part of English folk history as to require an anniversary celebration, as Guy Fawkes Day is celebrated each year with fireworks and bonfires. Explanations for this phenomenom that relate to the state of the English popular mind in 1605 may in part account for the tragedy in *King Lear*, too.

We may try to imagine that we are sitting in the Globe Theatre one afternoon in 1605, admiring the elaborate costumes of King Lear and his courtiers, listening to the clear voices of the boys playing the women's parts, laughing both at the jokes of the Fool and at the ravings of Mad Tom. The audience is drinking in the voices of the actors and the poetry of the speeches as eagerly as if they were modern Milanese listening to an opera. The Londoners who paid their hard-earned pence to be admitted to the theatre, instead of paying to see a bull baited in the bull ring, were connoisseurs of the speaking and singing voice. They expected powerful entertainment, and they received it in full force when they came to hear Shakespeare's *King Lear*.

THE OPENING RITUAL AND ITS BITTER CONSEQUENCES

The play opens in a short exchange between chatting courtiers who mention the important matter of the division of Lear's kingdom, introduce the vital theme of relations between parents and children, and, by their sudden jerk of attention when the trumpet sounds, fix the eyes of the audience upon the regal entry of King Lear. Without explanation, Lear plunges into the business of the ritual transfer of his kingly powers—and the daughters, speaking in order of age, go through their expected parts, Goneril and Regan fluently professing their love for their father, and Cordelia unable to express her deep devotion. Everything goes forward in the fairy-tale style of the old legend.

Yet when Cordelia repeats her "Nothing," and Lear's expected ritual is interrupted, the usual expectations about the development of the story are simultaneously abandoned. From this moment on, we begin to notice the man Lear beneath the kingly robes. He rages against Cordelia, then against Kent, in the accents of a monarch, but we also hear that he is obliged to smother the tones of a father and of a devoted master in his kingly wrath. We need not consider why Lear decided to divide his kingdom, or whether he was wise to choose such a ceremony for doing so; we are already moving into the consequences of the radical disturbance that has occurred. We shall not see Lear in his pride again, except in flashes; we shall see more and more of a man who has given away the power he once wielded. He becomes just an old man, then an old man given no reverence for his age, then a man reduced to madness, to childishness, and, at the end of the play, a man brought to a situation of total despair. Once Lear cannot maintain his view of himself as a king capable of ruling his country, his household and his daughters, he must suffer the bitterest agony before he can recognize himself again.

The transformation that Shakespeare has effected in the well-

known story is that each word and each action as it appears is unexpected. We see Lear principally, but the other characters, too, reacting to each moment of a continuing crisis. Consider Lear's speech in Act II, Scene iv, "Oh, reason not the need." He begins with an almost calm, compassionate insight into what is necessary to mankind for life, for repect, for comfort. Soon his equanimity is broken by the realization that his own deepest need is an equable temper in the face of Goneril's and Regan's provocations—"patience I need." His resentment overpowers his control, but he blames the gods before he blames his daughters—"you unnatural hags." As he mouths empty threats of revenge, he realizes his own exposed situation, and a sudden sense of peril overwhelms him. If nothing remains stable and none of the expectations of respect and devotion by which he has ruled until his eightieth year are to prevail, to what contemptible thing may he be reduced?

> You think I'll weep.
> No, I'll not weep:—
> I have full cause of weeping; but this heart
> Shall break into a hundred thousand flaws,
> Or e'er I'll weep.—O fool, I shall go mad!

Shakespeare has made each moment bear the burden of an event that we watch but cannot avert, as if we watched a film of the few minutes before an assassination. As audience, we are drawn into suffering, as witnesses all the heart-rendering consequences of Cordelia's "Nothing."

KING LEAR'S DESCENT INTO MADNESS

As we follow through the stages of Lear's madness, we see not only a mind, but a whole world in convulsion, as it might seem if we ourselves were mad. Shakespeare focuses our attention on Lear's reluctance to go over the edge of insanity. His sane mind sees the brink before him, and he tries to hold himself back against the suffering and agonized resentment that drive him over it. And his self-pity lures him over, to the comfort of abandoning reason, to an abasement of self-respect, to a state where all anxieties are suspended and every impulse may be indulged.

To make the shadow line between sanity and insanity more palpable, Shakespeare places next to Lear two men who are consciously and purposely crossing and recrossing it in each direction. Edgar, in perfect sanity, is counterfeiting the madness of a lunatic, Poor Tom. The Fool, who lives by his wits, is always obliged to pretend foolishness of a kind that has sense in it. Lear's Fool is portrayed as delicate and sensitive, and under the stress of the storm and Lear's sufferings, he seems not to be sure whether he is pretending foolishness or pretending wisdom.

While Lear retains his compassion, he cares more for the Fool's comfort than his own, and realizes that he is suffering no more on the heath than countless "poor naked wretches" also endure. But when he first sees Poor Tom, he begins to doubt his own identity, to see himself in the Bedlam beggar. Then, in the onset of sheer madness, Lear stumbles on a judgment that

sane people are reluctant to agree to, thought they know its truth: that a madman is only a human creature stripped of the last covering, reason, and that this nakedness does not decrease, but increases a lunatic's likeness to other human creatures.

> Is man no more than this? Consider him well. Thou owest the worm no silk, the beast no hide, the sheep no wool, the cat no perfume.—Ha! here's three on's are sophisticated.—Thou art the thing itself; unaccommodated man is no more but such a poor, bare, forkt animal as thou art.
>
> (Act III, Scene iv)

The "bare, forkt animal" that Lear becomes in his madness must examine each garment of sophisticated man before he can wear it again. He must rediscover the meaning of the relationship between parents and children, he must question the notion of elementary justice in which everyone trusts, he must find out by what right one man has authority over another, he must assess the huge presumption by which one man as king maintains a mysterious link between spiritual and temporal power. And he must submit himself to accepting whatever the gods may decide to do with earth-bound creatures.

PLOT AND SUBPLOT: THE UNFOLDING DISCOVERY OF TRAGEDY

The sense of crushing sorrow and hopeless bewilderment that great catastrophes produce always seems disproportionate to the immediate causes of disaster. Did Lear deserve such punishment for being arrogant and willful? Did Gloucester deserve to lose his eyes for being an easygoing lecher and a credulous father? Children need the protection of believing that disasters will be overcome by magic; men and women have to grapple with the existence of evil in the world, and desperately seek to avert the causes of disasters that may engulf the wholly innocent. The story from Sidney's *Arcadia* that Shakespeare used as a subplot combined the despair and the stoic courage of a tragic view of life.

Both Gloucester and Edgar are deceived by Edmund with unbelievable ease. The spectacle of Gloucester's eyeballs torn out before our own shrinking eyes is of exceptional barbarity. Shakespeare makes us believe that such things can happen. Then we recollect that we have always known, and have never brought ourselves to face the fact, that far worse horrors have happened in our own lifetime; we know where such things are happening in this instant. Shakespeare goes further: he makes us realize that the spiritual suffering of Lear is more agonizing than the physical suffering of Gloucester, and yet is more hope-giving, because of the self-understanding that Lear achieves. Gloucester is an average good-hearted, self-indulgent man whose casual pleasures bring down such direct retribution upon him that he acknowledges in his suffering the justice of heaven:

> Let the superfluous and lust-dieted man,
> That slaves your ordinance, that will not see
> Because he doth not feel, feel your power quickly.
>
> (Act IV, Scene i)

Edmund and Edgar, the bastard and the true-born sons, introduce almost diagrammatically opposite views of the nature of the universe. "Thou, Nature, art my goddess," says Edmund in the second scene of the play, and concludes his soliloquy:

Now, gods, stand up for bastards!

"Nature" to Edmund is a conglomerate of every force of ruthless self-seeking. Edgar, after enduring the humiliation of appearing as Mad Tom, and witnessing his father's cruel distress, still asserts that Nature is essentially beneficent:

> Men must endure
> Their going hence, even as their coming hither:
> Ripeness is all.
>
> (Act V, Scene ii)

As we watch the careers of Edmund and Edgar through the play, we see that each describes the same circle, beginning at opposite points. From the lowest, Edmund rises almost to kingship; from prosperity, Edgar sinks to the lowest degradation that a human creature can reach, but after he is again elevated, he has to stand by helplessly before all the misfortunes in the last scene.

THE ENDING OF THE PLAY AND THE CATHARSIS OF THE TRAGEDY

Aristotle called the beneficent effect of watching a tragedy a "catharsis," a cleansing or purging of the emotions by means of pity and terror. What Aristotle meant by "catharsis" has been in debate ever since. One explanation is that "The result of the catharsis is an emotional balance and equilibrium: and it may well be called a state of emotional health." The experience is rewarding because a tragic poet ". . . provokes the pure pleasures of exercising thought and emotion and the senses of sight and hearing upon themes which would be, but for the way he treats them, only painful." (Humphry House, *Aristotle's Poetics*, 1956)

Are the deaths of Cordelia and Lear necessary? Dr. Samuel Johnson said that the pain of reading the last scene of *King Lear* usually prevented him from finishing the play. When Lear and Cordelia are taken to prison, Lear celebrates his indifference to fortune, once he is reconciled with Cordelia, in tones of such sweetness—"We two alone will sing like birds i' the cage." (Act V Scene iii)—that everyone hopes they may be left in peace. By a combination of malice—Edmund's—and accident, Cordelia is hanged and Lear appears on the stage with Cordelia dead in his arms:

Howl, howl, howl, howl!

From this horrifying entrance until Lear's death, the response of the audience is balanced on a slender edge. Lear knows that Cordelia is dead, but he cannot bear to acknowledge it. He desperately appeals to physical tests, a feather, a glass, to tell him that she still lives. We wonder whether the shock has

unhinged him, or whether his mind, restored to sanity, is standing this last most fearful ordeal. Some critics have tried to argue that Lear dies in a moment of desperate hope, not of despair, in their attempts to see a hint of release for Lear at the end.

One critic has pointed out that we are witnessing not the death of the proud, petulant, and kingly Lear, for that character was driven out by madness on the heath. We are seeing the bitterest blows of fate raining upon a penitential man, who has already suffered and expiated his pride. Shakespeare, says J. Stampfer in "The Catharsis of King Lear," is helping each of us to control the most desperate terror that anyone may ever meet.

If a calamity of this earth-shaking force should happen to us, we shall remember that we have been in some fashion initiated by the representation of such a spectacle before our eyes and ears.

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BOOKS AND ARTICLES MENTIONED IN THE INTRODUCTION:

Shakespeare Survey 4, 1951; *Shakespeare Survey* 13, 1960, edited by Allardyce Nichol.

G. B. Harrison, *Shakespeare's Tragedies*, 1951.

Humphry House, *Aristotle's Poetics*, 1956.

Shakespeare's Tragedies (A collection of critical articles), edited by Lawrence Lerner, 1963.

Selected passages from Shakespeare's sources and important nineteenth and twentieth century criticisms of the play will be found in: *King Lear: Text, Sources, Criticism*, edited by G. B. Harrison and Robert F. McDonnell.

STUDY QUESTIONS ON *KING LEAR*

ACT 1

1. (Scene i) The play opens with the story of Lear's division of his kingdom already in progress. The conversation between Kent, Gloucester, and Edmund refers to some events that have already happened, some that are to come. What are they? What will be the audience's reaction to this sudden arrival in the middle of things?

2. Is the falseness of Goneril and Regan, is the sincerity of Cordelia, apparent in their individual styles of speaking? Compare the speeches, remembering Lear's pleasure in satisfactory answers to his ritual questions.

3. FRANCE: Fairest Cordelia, that art most rich, being poor; . . . Remember the King of France's characterization of Cordelia; it is of importance for the whole play. But what is its immediate effect?

4. (Scene ii) How do the different opinions of Gloucester and Edmund and Edgar about eclipses and astronomical portents indicate their ways of judging the motives of other people?

5. (Scene iii) In what ways does King Lear act and talk differently after he has given up his throne from the ways he talked and acted as king? Note his conversations with Kent, with Oswald, and with the Fool.

6. (Scene iv) In the quarrel between Lear and Goneril, which of the two seems to speak on more reasonable grounds? What justification has Lear for cursing Goneril?

ACT II

1. (Scene i) Edmund first persuades Edgar and Gloucester to accept his lies, then he so impresses Cornwall and Regan that they seek his service. What is the secret of Edmund's attractiveness? Why is he able to influence everyone?

2. (Scene ii) Kent and Oswald represent two kinds of faithful servants. What are the differences between them? What do we discover about the obligations of noble service in this scene?

3. (Scene iii) Keeping in mind the circumstances of staging Shakespeare's play on an open stage, work out how Scene iii could be interposed between the end of Scene ii and the beginning of Scene iv, both of which occasions see Kent in the stocks. If Kent remained on the stage during Edgar's speech, how are we supposed to imagine that Edgar is hiding in a wood?

4. (Scene iv) Consider two external symbols of Lear's situation: his man put into the stocks and the cutting down of his train of knights. What are the indications of the changing state of Lear's thoughts and emotions at each successive mention of these symbols?

5. What impression do you receive of the Fool's usual style in jokes and quips, from his speeches in Act I, Scenes iv and v, and Act II, Scene iv? Is there a change in his jesting style when you see him on the heath in Act III, Scene iv?

ACT III

1. In Scene i, the Gentleman describes Lear's reactions to the storm. In Scene ii, we see and hear Lear's reactions. Examine the way in which Shakespeare conveys the force and power of the storm in these scenes.

2. LEAR:

> I am a man
> More sinned against then sinning.

Which phrases express Lear's attitude to his own situation in the storm? How does he relate his situation to the tempestuous fury of the "great gods"?

3. (Scene iv) Examine Lear's speech "Poor naked wretches . . ." and look back at his earlier speeches in this scene. By what means is he managing to control the tempest in his mind?

4. What do you learn from Edgar of the lives that lunatics like Poor Tom lead? What character does Edgar ascribe to Poor Tom before he went mad?

5. ". . . hog in sloth, fox in stealth, wolf in greediness . . ." (Poor Tom) Edgar is expressing, in the concentrated form that the assumed madness permits, a theme constantly repeated in the imagery of *King Lear:* the likeness of men in their evil aspects to brutish beasts. Trace some of the comparisons used, especially by Lear, in characterizing the wickedness of Goneril and Regan. Is Edmund ever described in brutish images? Can you relate Edmund's idea of "Nature" to this image world of ravenous beasts?

6. What differences do you see in Lear after he has encountered Poor Tom? Why does he call Poor Tom a philosopher, a "learned Theban," a "good Athenian"?

7. (Scene vi) Lear brings the "she-foxes" Goneril and Regan to trial before the justices Poor Tom, the Fool, and Kent. What are Goneril and Regan accused of? Hardness of hearts? Why does Lear think of their offenses as crimes?

8. "And I'll go to bed at noon," says the Fool, and retires from the play. What contribution has he made to our understanding of Lear's state of mind? Why is his presence no longer needed?

9. (Scene vii) Gloucester says to Regan that he has sent Lear to Dover, "Because I would not see thy cruel nails / Pluck out his poor old eyes . . ." Examine the reactions of everyone on the stage when Gloucester's eyes are plucked out. In what way does Shakespeare guide our feelings as we witness this scene of horror?

10. The revolt of Cornwall's servant against his master is the first challenge made against the machinations of the evil characters. Is it in any sense a turning point in the play?

ACT IV

1. (*Scene i*) GLOUCESTER:

> As flies to wanton boys, are we to the gods,—
> They kill us for their sport.

This despairing view of fate has sometimes been taken as a comment upon the tragedy of *King Lear*. Can you find conclusions about human destiny expressed in Acts IV and V that contradict Gloucester's view?

2. (Scene ii) Why does Albany turn against Goneril? Why does Goneril prefer Edmund to Albany as lover and prospective husband?—here she gives the first indication of this desire. What actions result from these decisions and declarations?

3. Scenes i to vi in Act IV are each set in a different place, and each involves a different set of characters, except that Gloucester and Edgar leave the heath in Scene i and arrive at Dover in Scene vi, and Oswald moves from one place to another. By what means are the different settings made clear in each scene, and what is the dramatic effect of the frequent changes of locality and faces?

4. In Scene vi, Edgar describes an imaginary cliff in his speech "Come on, sir, here's the place" as the site of Gloucester's imagined suicidal fall and return to life. Cordelia's speech at the beginning of Scene iv prepares us for the entry of mad Lear, fantastically crowned with flowers. Does Shakespeare succeed in making these extraordinary occurrences dramatically credible?

5. (Scene vi) "Oh, matter and impertinency mixed!" says Edgar of Lear's mad speeches. Which clear and devastating truths about kingship, about sex, about justice, about vision, about authority are expressed in Lear's whirling words?

6. (Scene vii) Lear's reconciliation with Cordelia is the most pathetic scene in the play. How does Shakespeare maintain the dignity of both the joy and the pathos, and avoid any hint of maudlin sentimentality, though tears are often mentioned?

ACT V

1. Scene i is given over to forwarding the plot of the play: the progress of the battle, the intrigues of Edmund, the rivalry of Goneril and Regan for Edmund's love, the doubts of Albany, the fate of Lear and Cordelia. Look back through the play to see where Shakespeare has indicated the development of the situations that are pulled together here.

2. (Scene ii) The battle is won by Albany and Edmund and lost by Lear and Cordelia during the first six lines of the conversation between Edgar and Gloucester. By what device of staging could this brief interlude of alarums and excursions be made to look convincing as a battle? Is there any need to make it convincing?

3. (Scene iii) The Captain sent by Edmund to hang Cordelia (we learn later) accepts his commission with the remark:

I cannot draw a cart, nor eat dried oats;
If it be man's work, I'll do't.

What does this single speech of the Captain tell us about the motives of a murderer and about the fatality of Cordelia's death?

4. What final conclusions about Goneril and Regan may be derived from our last view of them, contesting for Edmund's love? Does their antagonism toward each other help to explain their attitudes toward their father?

5. What is the relevance of Edgar's eye-witness accounts of the death of Gloucester and of his meeting with Kent to the death of Lear that we are about to witness?

6. ALBANY:

Great thing of us forgot!—

The fates of Lear and Cordelia have been forgotten in the stress of other events. If someone had remembered them just after the defeat of Edmund, they might have been rescued. What can you deduce from the fact that Shakespeare made the final catastrophe depend upon an act of forgetfulness?

7. LEAR:

Her voice was ever soft,
Gentle, and low,—an excellent thing in woman.—

In what way does this single characteristic stand for the view of Cordelia that we have assembled through the play?

8. In Lear's two speeches over Cordelia's body, "A plague upon you, murderers, traitors all!" and "And my poor fool is hang'd!" note the phrases where Lear thinks that Cordelia lives, and the phrases where he has to acknowledge that she is dead. Do you agree with Professor Stampfer, who, in the essay quoted in the Introduction, says that when Lear thinks that Cordelia lives, his insanity is deceiving him into hope, and that when he knows that she is dead, his sanity is killing him by the force of the shock?

9. LEAR:

Why should a dog, a horse, a rat, have life,
And thou no breath at all?

Do you agree that "a universe where dogs, horses and rats live and Cordelias are butchered" offers no mitigations to man other than those he finds in himself (Stampfer)?

General Questions

1. Although most of the play is written in blank verse, Shakespeare used prose in some scenes. Try to decide why he uses prose where he does, noting particularly the variety of functions for prose.

2. When did you first begin to distinguish between Cornwall and Albany, between Goneril and Regan? What points in the characterization were made at those places?

3. The animal and bestial imagery in *King Lear* has often been commented upon. Are there any other clusters of images in the play that you have noticed? Images connected with the sea? with eating? Can you find others?

4. The Folio text of *King Lear*, from which modern editions are largely taken, may have been printed from an acting copy prepared for a production on a platform stage without either inner stage or balcony. Yet the inner stage of the theatre obviously served as the hovel in the scene on the heath, Act III, Scene iv. Do you see any other occasions in the play where the inner stage might be used?

5. No scene in *King Lear* specifically requires the use of the balcony, as the famous scene in *Romeo and Juliet* does, though there are some scenes that could be played on the balcony for convenience of staging. Do you think that the scene where Edgar supposedly leads Gloucester to the edge of a cliff (Act IV, Scene vi) should be played on the balcony?

6. It has been suggested that Shakespeare often inserts into his tragedies moments of calm before catastrophe. In *King Lear*, this moment would be the departure of Lear and Cordelia to prison (Act V, Scene iii). Compare the "Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow . . ." speech in *Macbeth*, Act V, Scene iv, and "It is the cause, it is the cause . . ." speech in *Othello*, Act V, Scene ii.

7. Look up Aristotle's *Poetics* to see his definition and description of tragedy.

8. By reference to other critics (beginning perhaps with Bradley's *Shakespearean Tragedy*, first published in 1904), and by your reading of the play, do your best to refute Professor Stampfer's ideas on the catharsis of King Lear.

9. EDGAR: "Speak what we feel, not what we ought to say" (Act V, Scene iii). This line, from the last speech in the play, gives a license to each reader to find for himself just what he feels about the effect of the tragedy in *King Lear*. There is no question by now of "what we ought to say"; there is every opportunity of speaking what we feel. But you must say as exactly as you can "what" you feel, by reference to lines and to situations that produce your reactions, with some effort to say "why" you react as you do. The play is yours.

KING LEAR

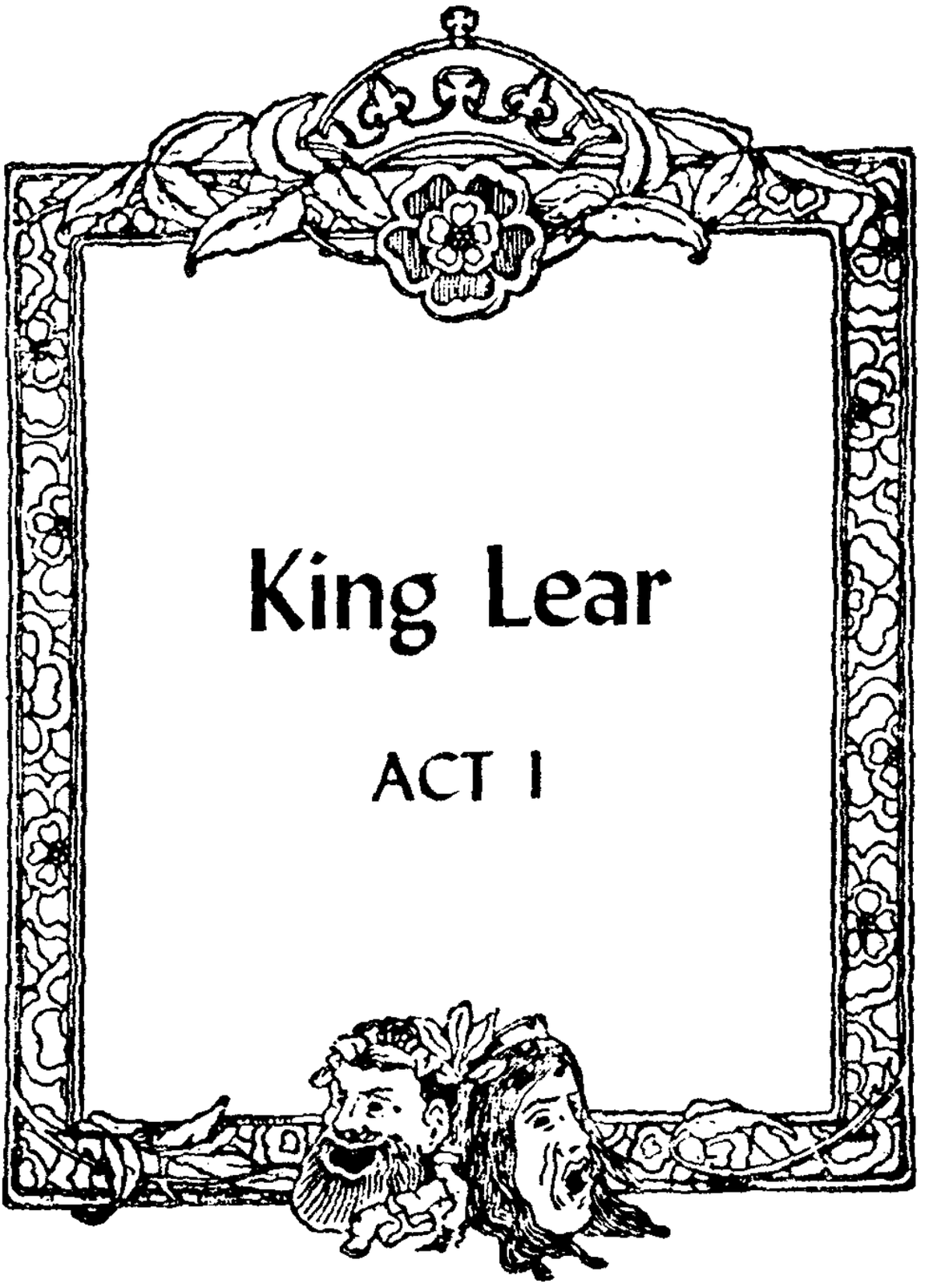
DRAMATIS PERSONAE

LEAR, *King of Britain.*
KING OF FRANCE.
DUKE OF BURGUNDY.
DUKE OF CORNWALL.
DUKE OF ALBANY.
EARL OF KENT.
EARL OF GLOSTER.
EDGAR, *son to Gloster.*
EDMUND, *bastard son to Gloster.*
CURAN, *a courtier.*
OSWALD, *steward to Goneril.*
OLD MAN, *tenant to Gloster.*
DOCTOR.
FOOL.
AN OFFICER, *employed by Edmund.*
GENTLEMAN, *atiendant on Cordelia.*
A HERALD.
SERVANTS *to Cornwall.*

GONERIL,
REGAN,
CORDELIA, } *daughters to Lear.*

KNIGHTS *attending on Lear,* OFFICERS, MESSENGERS, SOLDIERS, *and* ATTENDANTS.

SCENE—*Britain.*



King Lear

ACT I

ACT I

KING LEAR, according to his prearranged plan, divides up his kingdom between his daughters, asking them which one loves him most. The two elder daughters, Goneril and Regan, profess their love and receive their rewards, but Cordelia, the youngest, cannot speak her love, receives no portion, and is married off to the King of France without a dowry. The Duke of Kent is banished for taking her part. After living with Goneril for a short time, Lear discovers her insincerity and leaves for Regan's palace. The Duke of Gloucester is deceived by his bastard son Edmund into thinking that his true-born son, Edgar, desires his death.

ACT I. SCENE I.

KING LEAR'S *palace.*

Enter KENT, GLOSTER, *and* EDMUND.

EARL OF KENT.

I thought the king had more affected [1] the Duke of Albany than Cornwall.

EARL OF GLOSTER.

It did always seem so to us: but now, in the division of the kingdom, it appears not which of the dukes he values most; for equalities are so weigh'd, that curiosity[2] in neither can make choice of either's moiety.[3]

EARL OF KENT.

Is not this your son, my lord?

EARL OF GLOSTER.

His breeding, sir, hath been at my charge: I have so often blusht to acknowledge him, that now I am brazed [4] to't.

EARL OF KENT.

I cannot conceive[5] you.

EARL OF GLOSTER.

Sir, this young fellow's mother could: whereupon she grew round-womb'd, and had, indeed, sir, a son for her cradle ere she had a husband for her bed. Do you smell a fault? [6]

EARL OF KENT.

I cannot wish the fault undone, the issue of it being so proper.[7]

---

[1] **affected:** loved; favored. [2] **curiosity:** close appraisal. [3] **moiety:** share. [4] **brazed:** hardened; literally, brass-plated. [5] **conceive:** understand. [6] **fault:** misdeed; transgression; a quibble on the meaning of *fault* in hunting (loss of scent by the hounds). [7] **proper:** handsome.

EARL OF GLOSTER.

But I have a son, sir, by order of law, some year[1] elder than this, who yet is no dearer in my account: though this knave came something saucily into the world before he was sent for, yet was his mother fair; there was good sport at his making, and the whoreson[2] must be acknowledged.—Do you know this noble gentleman, Edmund?

EDMUND.

No, my lord.

EARL OF GLOSTER.

My Lord of Kent: remember him hereafter as my honourable friend.

EDMUND.

My services to your lordship.

EARL OF KENT.

I must love you, and sue[3] to know you better.

EDMUND.

Sir, I shall study deserving.[4]

EARL OF GLOSTER.

He hath been out[5] nine years, and away he shall again.—The king is coming.

Sennet. Enter one bearing a coronet, KING LEAR, CORNWALL, ALBANY, GONERIL, REGAN, CORDELIA, *and* ATTENDANTS.

KING LEAR.

Attend the Lords of France and Burgundy, Gloster.

EARL OF GLOSTER.

I shall, my liege. [*Exeunt* GLOSTER *and* EDMUND.]

---

[1] **some year:** about a year.
[2] **whoreson:** bastard.
[3] **sue:** beg.
[4] **study deserving:** endeavor to be worthy.
[5] **out:** that is, out of the country.

KING LEAR.

Meantime we shall express our darker[1] purpose.
Give me the map there. Know we have divided
In three our kingdom: and 'tis our fast[2] intent
To shake all cares and business from our age;
Conferring them on younger strengths, while we
Unburden'd crawl toward death.—Our son of Cornwall,
And you, our no less loving son of Albany,
We have this hour a constant will [3] to publish
Our daughters' several dowers, that future strife
May be prevented now. The princes, France and Burgundy,
Great rivals in our youngest daughter's love,
Long in our court have made their amorous sojourn,
And here are to be answer'd. Tell me, my daughters,—
Since now we will divest us both of rule,
Interest of territory, cares of state,—
Which of you shall we say doth love us most?
That we our largest bounty may extend
Where nature doth with merit challenge.[4] Goneril,
Our eldest-born, speak first.

GONERIL.

Sir, I love you more than words can wield the matter;[5]
Dearer than eyesight, space,[6] and liberty;
Beyond what can be valued, rich or rare;
No less than life, with grace, health, beauty, honour;
As much as child e'er loved, or father found;

---

[1] darker: more secret. [2] fast: steadfast; fixed. [3] constant will: firm intention. [4] Where nature doth with merit challenge: where natural affection competes with the merits of the receiver of the gift. [5] more than words can wield the matter: beyond the power of words to express. [6] space: freedom of choice.

A love that makes breath poor, and speech unable;
Beyond all manner of so much I love you.

CORDELIA [*aside*].

What shall Cordelia do? Love, and be silent.

KING LEAR.

Of all these bounds,[1] even from this line to this,
With shadowy forests and with champains richt,[2]
With plenteous rivers and wide-skirted meads,[3]
We make thee lady: to thine and Albany's issue
Be this perpetual. What says our second daughter,
Our dearest Regan, wife to Cornwall? Speak.

REGAN.

I am made of that self [4] metal as my sister,
And prize me at her worth. In my true heart
I find she names my very deed of love;[5]
Only she comes too short,[6]—that I profess
Myself an enemy to all other joys,
Which the most precious square[7] of sense possesses;
And find I am alone felicitate
In your dear highness' love.

CORDELIA [*aside*].

Then poor Cordelia!
And yet not so; since, I am sure, my love's
More richer than my tongue.

KING LEAR.

To thee and thine hereditary[8] ever
Remain this ample third of our fair kingdom;
No less in space, validity, and pleasure,
Than that conferr'd on Goneril.—Now, our joy,
Although our last, not least; to whose young love
The vines of France and milk[9] of Burgundy

---

[1] **bounds**: boundaries; limits. [2] **champains richt**: rich, unwooded plains. [3] **meads**: meadows. [4] **self**: same. [5] **my very deed of love**: the exact state of my own love. [6] **comes too short**: *falls short*. [7] **square**: *criterion*; as a *carpenter's square*. [8] **hereditary**: heirs. [9] **milk**: pastures.

Strive to be interest;[1] what can you say to draw
A third more opulent than your sisters? Speak.

CORDELIA.

Nothing, my lord.

KING LEAR.

Nothing!

CORDELIA.

Nothing.

KING LEAR.

Nothing will come of nothing: speak again.

CORDELIA.

Unhappy that I am, I cannot heave
My heart into my mouth: I love your majesty
According to my bond;[2] nor more nor less.

KING LEAR.

How, how, Cordelia! mend your speech a little,
Lest it may mar[3] your fortunes.

CORDELIA.

Good my lord,
You have begot me, bred me, loved me: I
Return those duties back as are right fit,[4]
Obey you, love you, and most honour you.
Why have my sisters husbands, if they say
They love you all? Haply,[5] when I shall wed,
That lord whose hand must take my plight[6] shall carry
Half my love with him, half my care and duty:
Sure, I shall never marry like my sisters,
To love my father all.[7]

KING LEAR.

But goes thy heart with this?

CORDELIA.

Ay, good my lord.

---

[1] **Strive to be interest:** try to be interested, or concerned, in your share. [2] **According to my bond:** according to my obligation as a daughter. [3] **mar:** adversely affect. [4] **fit:** proper. [5] **Haply:** it may come about. [6] **plight:** plighted troth. [7] **all:** above all others; exclusively.

KING LEAR.

So young, and so untender?

CORDELIA.

So young, my lord, and true.

KING LEAR.

Let it be so,—thy truth, then, be thy dower:
For, by the sacred radiance of the sun,
The mysteries of Hecate,[1] and the night;
By all the operation of the orbs[2]
From whom we do exist, and cease to be;
Here I disclaim all my paternal care,
Propinquity and property of blood,
And as a stranger to my heart and me
Hold thee, from this, for ever. The barbarous Scythian,
Or he that makes his generation messes[3]
To gorge his appetite, shall to my bosom
Be as well neighbour'd,[4] pitied, and relieved,
As thou my sometime[5] daughter.

EARL OF KENT.

Good my liege,—

KING LEAR.

Peace, Kent!
Come not between the dragon and his wrath.—
I loved her most, and thought to set my rest[6]
On her kind nursery.[7]—Hence, and avoid my sight!—
So be my grave my peace, as here I give
Her father's heart from her!—Call France;—who stirs?
Call Burgundy.—Cornwall and Albany,
With my two daughters' dowers digest this third:
Let pride, which she calls plainness,[8] marry her.

---

[1] **Hecate:** the Greek goddess of the lower world who ruled over magic and witchcraft. [2] **orbs:** stars and planets. [3] **he that makes his generation messes:** someone who devours his own children (messes: a portion of food). [4] **shall . . . neighbour'd:** shall be as close in my affections. [5] **sometime:** former. [6] **set my rest:** stake everything I possess. [7] **kind nursery:** tender care (in his old age). [8] **plainness:** frankness.

I do invest you jointly in my power,
Pre-eminence, and all the large effects
That troop[1] with majesty.—Ourself, by monthly course,
With reservation of an hundred knights,
By you to be sustain'd, shall our abode
Make with you by due turns. Only we still retain
The name, and all the additions to[2] a king;
The sway, revenue, execution of the rest,
Beloved sons, be yours: which to confirm,
This coronet part betwixt you. [*Giving the crown.*

EARL OF KENT.

Royal Lear,
Whom I have ever honour'd as my king,
Loved as my father, as my master follow'd,
As my great patron thought on in my prayers,—

KING LEAR.

The bow is bent and drawn, make from[3] the shaft.

EARL OF KENT.

Let it fall rather, though the fork invade
The region of my heart: be Kent unmannerly,[4]
When Lear is mad. What wouldst thou do, old man?
Think'st thou that duty shall have dread to speak,
When power to flattery bows? To plainness honour's bound,
When majesty falls to folly.[5] Reverse thy doom;[6]
And, in thy best consideration, check
This hideous rashness: answer my life my judgement,[7]
Thy youngest daughter does not love thee least;
Nor are those empty-hearted whose low sound
Reverbs[8] no hollowness.

---

[1] **troop:** are associated. [2] **the additions to:** the *titles* and trappings of. [3] **make from:** avoid. [4] **unmannerly:** out of order; that is, not to speak his mind. [5] **folly:** madness. [6] **doom:** decision; sentence. [7] **answer *my life my judgement*:** let my life answer for my judgment. [8] **Reverbs:** reechoes; reverberates.

KING LEAR.

Kent, on thy life, no more.

EARL OF KENT.

My life I never held but as a pawn
To wage against thine enemies; nor fear to lose it,
Thy safety being the motive.

KING LEAR.

Out of my sight!

EARL OF KENT.

See better, Lear; and let me still remain
The true blank[1] of thine eye.

KING LEAR.

Now, by Apollo,—

EARL OF KENT.

Now, by Apollo, king,
Thou swear'st thy gods in vain.

KING LEAR.

O, vassal! miscreant![2]
[*Laying his hand on his sword.*

DUKES OF ALBANY *and* CORNWALL.

Dear sir, forbear.

EARL OF KENT.

Do;
Kill thy physician, and the fee bestow
Upon the foul disease. Revoke thy doom;
Or, whilst I can vent clamour from my throat,
I'll tell thee thou dost evil.

KING LEAR.

Hear me, recreant![3]
On thine allegiance, hear me!
Since thou hast sought to make us break our vow,
Which we durst never yet, and with strain'd pride[4]

---

[1] **true blank**: the center of attention (target).
[2] **miscreant**: faithless one.
[3] **recreant**: a man faithless to his pledge of allegiance.
[4] **strain'd pride**: forced (unnatural) arrogance.

To come between our sentence and our power,
Which nor our nature nor our place can bear,
Our potency made good,[1] take thy reward.
Five days we do allot thee, for provision
To shield thee from diseases[2] of the world;
And, on the sixth, to turn thy hated back
Upon our kingdom: if, on the tenth day following,
Thy banisht trunk[3] be found in our dominions,
The moment is thy death. Away! by Jupiter,
This shall not be revoked.

EARL OF KENT.

Fare thee well, king: sith[4] thus thou wilt appear,
Freedom lives hence, and banishment is here.
[*to* CORDELIA] The gods to their dear shelter take thee, maid,
That justly think'st, and hast most rightly said!
[*to* REGAN *and* CONERIL] And your large[5] speeches may your deeds approve,[6]
That good effects may spring from words of love.
Thus Kent, O princes, bids you all adieu;
He'll shape his old course in a country new. [*Exit.*

Flourish. Enter GLOSTER, *with* FRANCE, BURGUNDY, *and* ATTENDANTS.

EARL OF GLOSTER.

Here's France and Burgundy, my noble lord.

KING LEAR.

My Lord of Burgundy,
We first address towards you, who with this king
Hath rivall'd for our daughter, what, in the least,[7]
Will you require in present dower with her,
Or cease your quest of love?

---

[1] Our potency made good: that is, reasserting my authority. [2] diseases: dis-eases; vexations and problems. [3] trunk: body or person. [4] sith: since. [5] large: extravagant. [6] approve: live up to. [7] in the least: at the lowest estimation.

DUKE OF BURGUNDY.

Most royal majesty,
I crave no more than hath your highness offer'd,
Nor will you tender[1] less.

KING LEAR.

Right noble Burgundy,
When she was dear to us, we did hold her so;
But now her price is faln. Sir, there she stands:
If aught within that little-seeming substance,
Or all of it, with our displeasure pieced,[2]
And nothing more, may fitly like[3] your Grace,
She's there, and she is yours.

DUKE OF BURGUNDY.

I know no answer.

KING LEAR.

Will you, with those infirmities she owes,[4]
Unfriended, new-adopted to our hate,
Dower'd with our curse, and stranger'd with our oath,
Take her, or leave her?

DUKE OF BURGUNDY.

Pardon me, royal sir;
Election makes not up on such conditions.[5]

KING LEAR.

Then leave her, sir; for, by the power that made me,
I tell you all her wealth.—[*to* FRANCE] For you, great king,
I would not from your love make such a stray,[6]
To match you where I hate; therefore beseech you
T'avert your liking a more worthier way
Than on a wretch whom nature is ashamed
Almost t'acknowledge hers.

---

[1] **tender**: offer. [2] **pieced**: pieced out; that is, with our added displeasure, or disapproval. [3] **fitly like**: rightly please. [4] **owes**: owns; possesses. [5] **Election makes not up on such conditions**: I have no choice under such conditions as these. [6] **stray**: departure.

KING OF FRANCE.

This is most strange,
That she, that even but now was your best object,
The argument of your praise, balm of your age,
Most best, most dearest, should in this trice of time[1]
Commit a thing so monstrous, to dismantle
So many folds of favour. Sure, her offence
Must be of such unnatural degree,
That monsters it,[2] or your fore-voucht affection
Faln into taint:[3] which to believe of her,
Must be a faith that reason without miracle
Should never plant in me.

CORDELIA.

I yet beseech your majesty,—
If for[4] I want[5] that glib and oily art,
To speak and purpose not; since what I well intend,
I'll do't before I speak,—that you make known
It is no vicious blot, murder, or foulness,
No unchaste action, or dishonour'd step,
That hath deprived me of your grace and favour;
But even for want of that for which I am richer,—
A still-soliciting eye,[6] and such a tongue
As I am glad I have not, though not to have it
Hath lost me in your liking.[7]

KING LEAR.

Better thou
Hadst not been born than not t'have pleased me better.

KING OF FRANCE.

Is it but this? a tardiness in nature[8]
Which often leaves the history unspoke

---

[1] trice of time: instantly (in a trice). [2] monsters it: makes it a monster. [3] your fore-voucht affection/Faln into taint: that is, the love you formerly avouched sullied, and thus the former love itself doubted. [4] If for: even if. [5] want: lack. [6] still-soliciting: always begging. [7] Hath . . . liking: has deprived me of your love. [8] tardiness in nature: natural reserve, or reticence.

That it intends to do? My Lord of Burgundy,
What say you to the lady? Love's not love
When it is mingled with regards[1] that stand
Aloof from the entire point. Will you have her?
She is herself a dowry.

DUKE OF BURGUNDY.

Royal Lear,
Give but that portion which yourself proposed,
And here I take Cordelia by the hand,
Duchess of Burgundy.

KING LEAR.

Nothing: I have sworn; I am firm.

DUKE OF BURGUNDY.

I am sorry, then, you have so lost a father
That you must lose a husband.

CORDELIA.

Peace be with Burgundy!
Since that[2] respects of fortune[3] are his love,
I shall not be his wife.

KING OF FRANCE.

Fairest Cordelia, that art most rich, being poor;
Most choice, forsaken; and most loved, despised!
Thee and thy virtues here I seize upon:
Be it lawful I take up what's cast away.
Gods, gods! 'tis strange that from their cold'st neglect
My love should kindle to inflamed respect.—
Thy dowerless daughter, king, thrown to my chance,[4]
Is queen of us, of ours, and our fair France:
Not all the dukes of waterish[5] Burgundy
Can buy this unprized precious maid of me.—
Bid them farewell, Cordelia, though unkind:

---

[1] **regards**: considerations.
[2] **Since that**: since.
[3] **respects of fortune**: financial considerations.
[4] **chance**: lot.
[5] **waterish**: weak; characterless.

Thou losest here, a better where to find.[1]

KING LEAR.

Thou hast her, France: let her be thine; for we
Have no such daughter, nor shall ever see
That face of hers again:—Therefore be gone
Without our grace,[2] our love, our benison.[3]—
Come, noble Burgundy.

[*Flourish. Exeunt* LEAR, BURGUNDY, CORNWALL, ALBANY, GLOSTER *and* ATTENDANTS.

KING OF FRANCE.

Bid farewell to your sisters.

CORDELIA.

The jewels of our father, with washt[4] eyes
Cordelia leaves you: I know you what you are;
And, like a sister, am most loth to call
Your faults as they are named. Love well our father:
To your professed bosoms[5] I commit him:
But yet, alas, stood I within his grace,
I would prefer him to a better place.
So, farewell to you both.

REGAN.

Prescribe not us our duties.

GONERIL.

Let your study
Be to content your lord, who hath received you
At fortune's alms.[6] You have obedience scanted,
And well are worth the want that you have wanted.[7]

CORDELIA.

Time shall unfold what pleated[8] cunning hides:
Who covers faults, at last shame them derides.
Well may you prosper!

---

[1] **a better where to find:** a better nowhere to be found. [2] **grace:** *favor.* [3] **benison:** *blessing.* [4] **washt:** *tearful.* [5] **professed bosoms:** that is, the love they profess for their father. [6] **At fortune's alms:** as a petty gift from fortune. [7] **well are worth the want that you have wanted:** you well deserve the same disregard that you have shown your father. [8] **pleated:** intricately folded.

KING OF FRANCE.

Come, my fair Cordelia.

[*Exeunt* FRANCE *and* CORDELIA.

GONERIL.

Sister, it is not a little I have to say of what most nearly appertains to us both. I think our father will hence[1] to-night.

REGAN.

That's most certain, and with you; next month with us.

GONERIL.

You see how full of changes his age is; the observation we have made of it hath not been little: he always loved our sister most; and with what poor judgement he hath now cast her off appears too grossly.[2]

REGAN.

'Tis the infirmity of his age: yet he hath ever but slenderly known himself.

GONERIL.

The best and soundest of his time[3] hath been but rash; then must we look to receive from his age, not alone the imperfections of long-ingrafted[4] condition, but therewithal the unruly waywardness that infirm and choleric years bring with them.

REGAN.

Such unconstant starts[5] are we like to have from him as this of Kent's banishment.

GONERIL.

There is further compliment[6] of leave-taking between France and him. Pray you, let's hit together:[7] if our father carry authority with such dispositions as he bears, this last surrender[8]

---

[1] **hence:** *leave here.* [2] ***too grossly:*** *only too obvious.* [3] **The best and soundest of his time:** that is, at his best moments in his *younger years.* [4] **long-ingrafted:** long-imbedded, or ingrained. [5] **unconstant starts:** fits of temper or rash acts. [6] **compliment:** *ceremony; formality.* [7] **let's hit together:** let's join in concerted action, or let's stick together. [8] **surrender:** his act of giving Cordelia away to the King of France.

of his will but offend us.[1]

REGAN.

We shall further think on't.

GONERIL.

We must do something, and i'the heat.[2] [*Exeunt.*

SCENE II.

The EARL OF GLOSTER'S *castle.*

Enter EDMUND, *with a letter.*

EDMUND.

Thou, nature, art my goddess; to thy law
My services are bound. Wherefore should I
Stand in the plague of custom,[3] and permit
The curiosity of nations[4] to deprive me,
For that[5] I am some twelve or fourteen moonshines[6]
Lag of[7] a brother? Why bastard? wherefore base?[8]
When my dimensions are as well compact,
My mind as generous,[9] and my shape as true,
As honest madam's issue? Why brand they us
With base? with baseness? bastardy? base, base?
Who, in the lusty stealth of nature, take
More composition and fierce quality
Than doth, within a dull, stale, tired bed,
Go to th' creating a whole tribe of fops,[10]
Got 'tween asleep and wake?—Well, then,
Legitimate Edgar, I must have your land:
Our father's love is to the bastard Edmund
As to th'legitimate: fine word,—legitimate!
Well, my legitimate, if this letter speed,
And my invention thrive,[11] Edmund the base

---

[1] **offend us:** injure us or be offensive to us. [2] **i'the heat:** strike while the iron is hot. [3] **Stand in the plague of custom:** submit to the nuisances or inconveniences of convention. [4] **curiosity of nations:** over-niceties and distinctions of human laws. [5] **For that:** because. [6] **moonshines:** months. [7] **lag of:** behind. [8] **base:** inferior; low born. [9] **generous:** courageous. [10] **fops:** fools. [11] **invention thrive:** plans succeed.

Shall top th'legitimate—I grow; I prosper:—
Now, gods, stand up for bastards!

Enter GLOSTER.

EARL OF GLOSTER.

Kent banisht thus! and France in choler parted![1]
And the king gone to-night! subscribed[2] his power!
Confined to exhibition![3] All this done
Upon the gad![4]—Edmund, how now! what news?

EDMUND.

So please your lordship, none. [*Putting up the letter.*

EARL OF GLOSTER.

Why so earnestly seek you to put up that letter?

EDMUND.

I know no news, my lord.

EARL OF GLOSTER.

What paper were you reading?

EDMUND.

Nothing, my lord.

EARL OF GLOSTER.

No? What needed, then, that terrible dispatch[5] of it into your pocket? the quality of nothing hath not such need to hide itself. Let's see: come, if it be nothing, I shall not need spectacles.

EDMUND.

I beseech you, sir, pardon me: it is a letter from my brother, that I have not all o'er-read; and for so much as I have perused, I find it not fit for your o'er-looking.[6]

EARL OF GLOSTER.

Give me the letter, sir.

---

[1] **in choler parted:** departed in anger. [2] **subscribed:** prescribed; limited. [3] **confined to exhibition:** restricted to an allowance (from his two daughters). [4] **Upon the gad:** on the spur of the moment. [5] **terrible dispatch:** hasty thrusting. [6] **o'er-looking:** reading.

EDMUND.

I shall offend, either to detain or give it. The contents, as in part I understand them, are to blame.

EARL OF GLOSTER.

Let's see, let's see.

EDMUND.

I hope, for my brother's justification, he wrote this but as an essay[1] or taste of my virtue.

EARL OF GLOSTER [*reads*].

This policy and reverence of age makes the world bitter to the best of our times;[2] keeps our fortunes from us till our oldness cannot relish[3] them. I begin to find an idle and fond [4] bondage in the oppression of aged tyranny; who sways, not as it hath power, but as it is suffer'd.[5] Come to me, that of this I may speak more. If our father would sleep till I waked him, you should enjoy half his revenue for ever, and live the beloved of your brother, EDGAR.

Hum—conspiracy!—'Sleep till I waked him, you should enjoy half his revenue!'—My son Edgar! Had he a hand to write this? a heart and brain to breed it in?—When came this to you? who brought it?

EDMUND.

It was not brought me, my lord,—there's the cunning of it; I found it thrown in at the casement[6] of my closet.[7]

EARL OF GLOSTER.

You know the character[8] to be your brother's?

EDMUND.

If the matter were good, my lord, I durst swear it were his; but, in respect of that, I would fain[9] think it were not.

---

[1] **essay:** test; trial. [2] **the best of our times:** the best years of our lives. [3] **relish:** appreciate. [4] **fond:** foolish. [5] **who sways, not as it hath power, but as it is suffer'd:** who rules not through real power but through the tolerance of those affected. [6] **casement:** window. [7] **closet:** bedroom or private chamber. [8] **character:** handwriting. [9] **fain:** gladly; willingly.

EARL OF GLOSTER.

It is his.

EDMUND.

It is his hand, my lord; but I hope his heart is not in the contents.

EARL OF GLOSTER.

Has he never before sounded you[1] in this business?

EDMUND.

Never, my lord: but I have heard him oft maintain it to be fit,[2] that, sons at perfect age, and fathers declining, the father should be as ward to the son, and the son manage his revenue.

EARL OF GLOSTER.

O villain, villain!—His very opinion in the letter!—Abhorred villain! Unnatural, detested,[3] brutish villain! worse than brutish!—Go, sirrah, seek him; I'll apprehend[4] him:—abominable villain!—Where is he?

EDMUND.

I do not well know, my lord. If it shall please you to suspend your indignation against my brother till you can derive from him better testimony of his intent, you shall run a certain course;[5] where, if you violently proceed against him, mistaking his purpose, it would make a great gap[6] in your own honour, and shake in pieces the heart of his obedience. I dare pawn down[7] my life for him, that he hath writ this to feel my affection to your honour, and to no other pretence of danger.[8]

EARL OF GLOSTER.

Think you so?

EDMUND.

If your honour judge it meet,[9] I will place you where you

---

[1] **sounded you:** sounded you out. [2] **fit:** proper. [3] **detested:** detestable. [4] **apprehend:** arrest. [5] **you shall run a certain course:** be certain that you are pursuing the right course. [6] **gap:** breach. [7] **pawn down:** stake. [8] **pretence of danger:** dangerous intention. [9] **meet:** appropriate.

shall hear us confer of this, and by an auricular assurance[1] have your satisfaction; and that without any further delay than this very evening.

EARL OF GLOSTER.

He cannot be such a monster—

EDMUND.

Nor is not, sure.

EARL OF GLOSTER.

To his father, that so tenderly and entirely loves him.—Heaven and earth!—Edmund, seek him out; wind me into him,[2] I pray you: frame the business after your own wisdom. I would unstate myself, to be in a due resolution.[3]

EDMUND.

I will seek him, sir, presently;[4] convey the business as I shall find means, and acquaint you withal.

EARL OF GLOSTER.

These late eclipses in the sun and moon portend no good to us: though the wisdom of nature can reason it thus and thus, yet nature finds itself scourged by the sequent effects:[5] love cools, friendship falls off,[6] brothers divide: in cities, mutinies, in countries, discord; in palaces, treason; and the bond crackt 'twixt son and father. This villain of mine comes under the prediction; there's son against father: the king falls from bias of nature;[7] there's father against child. We have seen the best of our time: machinations, hollowness,[8] treachery, and all ruinous disorders, follow us disquietly to our graves.—Find out this villain, Edmund; it shall lose thee nothing; do it carefully.—And the noble and true-hearted Kent banisht! his offence, honesty!—'Tis strange. [*Exit.*

---

[1] **by an auricular assurance:** by hearing his answer with your own ears. [2] **wind me into him:** win his confidence for me. [3] **I would . . . resolution:** I would give all I have to know the truth. [4] **presently:** immediately. [5] **though . . . effects:** though human philosophy may explain these happenings, the world of man is grievously affected by the disasters that follow them. [6] **falls off:** revolts. [7] **falls from bias of nature:** goes against his natural instincts. [8] **hollowness:** falseness.

EDMUND.

This is the excellent foppery[1] of the world, that, when we are sick in fortune,—often the surfeit of our own behaviour,—we make guilty of our disasters the sun, the moon, and the stars: as if we were villains by necessity; fools by heavenly compulsion; knaves, thieves, and treachers,[2] by spherical predominance; drunkards, liars, and adulterers, by an enforced obedience of planetary influence; and all that we are evil in, by a divine thrusting on:[3] an admirable evasion of whoremaster man, to lay his goatish[4] disposition to the charge of a star! My father compounded with my mother under the dragon's tail; and my nativity was under *ursa major*;[5] so that it follows, I am rough and lecherous.—Fut, I should have been that I am, had the maidenliest star in the firmament twinkled on my bastardizing.—Edgar! pat he comes like the catastrophe of the old comedy:[6] my cue is villainous melancholy, with a sigh like Tom o'Bedlam.[7]

Enter EDGAR.

O, these eclipses do portend these divisions! fa, sol, la, mi.

EDGAR.

How now, brother Edmund! what serious contemplation are you in?

EDMUND.

I am thinking, brother, of a prediction I read this other day, what should follow these eclipses.

EDGAR.

Do you busy yourself with that?

---

[1] **foppery:** folly; stupidity. [2] **treachers:** traitors. [3] **divine thrusting on:** supernatural incitement. [4] **goatish:** lascivious. [5] ***ursa major:*** the constellation of the Great Bear. [6] **pat . . . comedy:** that is, he comes right on the dot, like the final episode in the old comedies. [7] **Tom o'Bedlam:** Tom, a common name for a beggar, and Bedlam, a contraction of St. Mary of Bethlehem, a London hospital for the insane.

EDMUND.

I promise you, the effects he writes of succeed unhappily; as of unnaturalness between the child and the parent; death, dearth, dissolutions of ancient amities; divisions in state, menaces and maledictions against king and nobles; needless diffidences,[1] banishment of friends, dissipation of cohorts,[2] nuptial breaches, and I know not what.

EDGAR.

How long have you been a sectary astronomical? [3]

EDMUND.

Come, come; when saw you my father last?

EDGAR.

The night gone by.

EDMUND.

Spake you with him?

EDGAR.

Ay, two hours together.

EDMUND.

Parted you in good terms? Found you no displeasure in him by word nor countenance? [4]

EDGAR.

None at all.

EDMUND.

Bethink yourself wherein you may have offended him: and at my entreaty forbear his presence till some little time hath qualified [5] the heat of his displeasure; which at this instant so rageth in him, that with the mischief of your person it would scarcely allay.[6]

EDGAR.

Some villain hath done me wrong.

---

[1] **diffidences:** suspicions; doubts. [2] **dissipation of cohorts:** disintegration of the army through desertion and illness. [3] **sectary astronomical:** student or disciple of astrology. [4] **countenance:** behavior. [5] **qualified:** abated; mitigated. [6] **the mischief of your person it would scarcely allay:** that is, even doing physical harm to you would not fully satisfy him.

EDMUND.

That's my fear. I pray you, have a continent[1] forbearance till the speed of his rage goes slower; and, as I say, retire with me to my lodging, from whence I will fitly[2] bring you to hear my lord speak: pray you, go; there's my key:—if you do stir abroad, go arm'd.

EDGAR.

Arm'd, brother!

EDMUND.

Brother, I advise you to the best; I am no honest man if there be any good meaning toward you: I have told you what I have seen and heard; but faintly, nothing like the image and horror[3] of it: pray you, away.

EDGAR.

Shall I hear from you anon?

EDMUND.

I do serve you in this business. [*Exit* EDGAR.
A credulous father! and a brother noble,
Whose nature is so far from doing harms,
That he suspects none; on whose foolish honesty
My practices[4] ride easy!—I see the business.—
Let me, if not by birth, have lands by wit:
All with me's meet that I can fashion fit.[5] [*Exit.*

Scene III.

The DUKE OF ALBANY'S *palace.*

Enter GONERIL *and* OSWALD, *her steward.*

GONERIL.

Did my father strike my gentleman for chiding of his fool?

---

[1] **continent:** temperate.
[2] **fitly:** opportunely; at the right time.
[3] **image and horror:** horrible reality.
[4] **practices:** stratagems; intrigues.
[5] **All with me's meet that I can fashion fit:** everything is fitting that serves my ends; in other words, the end justifies the means.

OSWALD.

Ay, madam.

GONERIL.

By day and night, he wrongs me; every hour
He flashes into one gross crime or other,
That sets us all at odds: I'll not endure it:
His knights grow riotous, and himself upbraids us
On every trifle.—When he returns from hunting,
I will not speak with him; say I am sick:—
If you come slack of former services,[1]
You shall do well; the fault of it I'll answer.[2]

[*Horns within.*

OSWALD.

He's coming, madam; I hear him.

GONERIL.

Put on what weary negligence you please,
You and your fellows; I'ld have it come to question:[3]
If he distaste it, let him to my sister,
Whose mind and mine, I know, in that are one,
Not to be over-ruled. Idle[4] old man,
That still would manage those authorities
That he hath given away!—Now, by my life,
Old fools are babes again; and must be used
With checks as flatteries, when they are seen abused.[5]
Remember what I have said.

OSWALD.

Very well, madam.

GONERIL.

And let his knights have colder[6] looks among you;
What grows of it, no matter; advise your fellows so:

---

[1] **If you come slack of former services:** if you are less dutiful (to King Lear) than formerly. [2] **answer:** be answerable for. [3] **to question:** to a discussion or argument. [4] **idle:** foolish. [5] **With checks as flatteries, when they are seen abused:** Johnson says "Old men must be treated with checks (rebukes) when they are seen to be deceived with flatteries." [6] **colder:** unfriendlier.

I would breed from hence occasions,[1] and I shall,
That I may speak:—I'll write straight[2] to my sister,
To hold my very course.—Prepare for dinner. [*Exeunt.*

Scene IV.

A hall in the same.

Enter KENT, *disguised.*

EARL OF KENT.

If but as well I other accents borrow,
That can my speech defuse,[3] my good intent
May carry through itself to that full issue
For which I razed my likeness.[4]—Now, banisht Kent,
If thou canst serve where thou dost stand condemn'd,
So may it come, thy master, whom thou lovest,
Shall find thee full of labours.

Horns within. Enter LEAR, KNIGHT, *and* ATTENDANTS.

KING LEAR.

Let me not stay a jot[5] for dinner; go get it ready.
[*Exit an* ATTENDANT.

How now! what art thou?

EARL OF KENT.

A man, sir.

KING LEAR.

What dost thou profess? What wouldst thou with us?

EARL OF KENT.

I do profess to be no less than I seem; to serve him truly that will put me in trust; to love him that is honest; to con-

---

[1] I would breed from hence occasions: I would take advantage of such opportunities (for quarrels with King Lear). [2] straight: immediately. [3] defuse: disguise. [4] razed my likeness: destroyed my former appearance; with a pun on razed and razor, since he had shaved off his mustache. [5] stay a jot: wait a moment.

verse with him that is wise, and says little; to fear judgement; to fight when I cannot choose;[1] and to eat no fish.[2]

KING LEAR.

What art thou?

EARL OF KENT.

A very honest-hearted fellow, and as poor as the king.

KING LEAR.

If thou be as poor for a subject as he is for a king, thou art poor enough. What wouldst thou?

EARL OF KENT.

Service.

KING LEAR.

Who wouldst thou serve?

EARL OF KENT.

You.

KING LEAR.

Dost thou know me, fellow?

EARL OF KENT.

No, sir; but you have that in your countenance[3] which I would fain[4] call master.

KING LEAR.

What's that?

EARL OF KENT.

Authority.

KING LEAR.

What services canst thou do?

EARL OF KENT.

I can keep honest counsel, ride, run, mar a curious tale[5] in telling it, and deliver a plain message bluntly: that which ordinary men are fit for, I am qualified in; and the best of me is diligence.

---

[1] when I cannot choose: when I must.

[2] to eat no fish: meaning that he is loyal Protestant, not a Catholic who must eat fish on Friday.

[3] countenance: behavior; bearing.

[4] fain: gladly.

[5] mar a curious tale: mangle a complicated story.

KING LEAR.

How old art thou?

EARL OF KENT.

Not so young, sir, to love a woman for singing, nor so old to dote on her for any thing: I have years on my back forty-eight.

KING LEAR.

Follow me; thou shalt serve me: if I like thee no worse after dinner, I will not part from thee yet.—Dinner, ho, dinner!—Where's my knave? my fool?—Go you, and call my fool hither. [*Exit an* ATTENDANT.

Enter OSWALD.

You, you, sirrah, where's my daughter?

OSWALD.

So please you,— [*Exit.*

KING LEAR.

What says the fellow there? Call the clotpoll[1] back. [*Exit a* KNIGHT.]—Where's my fool, ho?—I think the world's asleep.

Enter KNIGHT.

How now! where's that mongrel?

KNIGHT.

He says, my lord, your daughter is not well.

KING LEAR.

Why came not the slave back to me when I call'd him?

KNIGHT.

Sir, he answer'd me in the roundest[2] manner, he would not.

KING LEAR.

He would not!

KNIGHT.

My lord, I know not what the matter is; but, to my judgement,

---

[1] **clotpoll**: clodpate; blockhead.

[2] **roundest**: rudest.

your highness is not entertain'd [1] with that ceremonious affection as you were wont; there's a great abatement of kindness appears as well in the general dependants as in the duke himself also and your daughter.

KING LEAR.

Ha! say'st thou so?

KNIGHT.

I beseech you, pardon me, my lord, if I be mistaken; for my duty cannot be silent when I think your highness wrong'd.

KING LEAR.

Thou but rememberest[2] me of mine own conception: I have perceived a most faint[3] neglect of late; which I have rather blamed as mine own jealous curiosity[4] than as a very pretence[5] and purpose of unkindness: I will look further into't. —But where's my fool? I have not seen him this two days.

KNIGHT.

Since my young lady's going into France, sir, the fool hath much pined away.

KING LEAR.

No more of that; I have noted it well.—Go you, and tell my daughter I would speak with her. [*Exit an* ATTENDANT.]— Go you, call hither my fool. [*Exit an* ATTENDANT.

Enter OSWALD.

O, you sir, you, come you hither, sir: who am I, sir?

OSWALD.

My lady's father.

---

[1] **entertain'd**: treated.
[2] **rememberest me**: remind me.
[3] **faint**: barely perceptible.
[4] **jealous curiosity**: sensitive pride; suspicious watchfulness.
[5] **very pretence**: real intention.

KING LEAR.

'My lady's father!' my lord's knave: you whoreson dog! you slave! you cur!

OSWALD.

I am none of these, my lord; I beseech your pardon.

KING LEAR.

Do you bandy looks[1] with me, you rascal? [*Striking him.*

OSWALD.

I'll not be struck, my lord.

EARL OF KENT.

Nor tript neither, you base football [2] player.

[*Tripping up his heels.*

KING LEAR.

I thank thee, fellow; thou servest me, and I'll love thee.

EARL OF KENT.

Come, sir, arise, away! I'll teach you differences: away, away! If you will measure your lubber's[3] length again, tarry: but away! go to: have you wisdom? so.

[*Pushes* OSWALD *out.*

KING LEAR.

Now, my friendly knave, I thank thee: there's earnest[4] of thy service. [*Giving* KENT *money.*

Enter FOOL.

FOOL.

Let me hire him too:—here's my coxcomb.[5]

[*Offering* KENT *his cap.*

KING LEAR.

How now, my pretty knave! how dost thou?

FOOL.

Sirrah, you were best take my coxcomb.

---

[1] **bandy looks**: exchange direct looks (as to an equal).
[2] **football**: football was not regarded as a gentleman's sport.
[3] **lubber**: clumsy fellow.
[4] **earnest**: a partial payment in token of services to be rendered.
[5] **coxcomb**: fool's cap, which was shaped like a cock's comb (crest).

EARL OF KENT.

Why, fool?

FOOL.

Why, for taking one's part that's out of favour: nay, an thou *canst not smile as the wind sits, thou'lt* catch cold shortly:[1] there, take my coxcomb: why, this fellow hath banisht two on's[2] daughters, and did the third a blessing against his will; if thou follow him, thou must needs wear my coxcomb.— How now, nuncle![3] Would I had two coxcombs and two daughters!

KING LEAR.

Why, my boy?

FOOL.

If I gave them all my living, I'd keep my coxcombs myself. There's mine; beg another of thy daughters.

KING LEAR.

Take heed, sirrah,—the whip.

FOOL.

Truth's a dog must to kennel; he must be whipt out, when Lady the brach[4] may stand by the fire and stink.

KING LEAR.

A pestilent gall[5] to me!

FOOL.

Sirrah, I'll teach thee a speech.

KING LEAR.

Do.

FOOL.

Mark it, nuncle;

Have more than thou showest,
Speak less than thou knowest,

---

[1] an thou canst not smile as the wind sits, thou'lt catch cold shortly: if you cannot get along with those you serve, it will go ill with you. [2] on's: of his.

[3] nuncle: a contraction of "mine uncle."

[4] Lady the brach: hunting bitch (in this passage *Truth* alludes to Cordelia and *brach* to Goneril). [5] gall: irritation.

Lend less than thou owest,[1]
Ride more than thou goest,[2]
Learn more than thou trowest,
Set less than thou throwest;[3]
Leave thy drink and thy whore,
And keep in-a-door,[4]
And thou shalt have more
Than two tens to a score.

EARL OF KENT.

This is nothing, fool.

FOOL.

Then 'tis like the breath of an unfee'd lawyer,[5]—you gave me nothing for't.—Can you make no use of nothing, nuncle?

KING LEAR.

Why, no, boy; nothing can be made out of nothing.

FOOL [*to* EARL OF KENT].

Prithee, tell him, so much[6] the rent of his land comes to: he will not believe a fool.

KING LEAR.

A bitter[7] fool!

FOOL.

Dost thou know the difference, my boy, between a bitter fool and a sweet fool?

KING LEAR.

No, lad; teach me.

FOOL.

That lord that counsell'd thee
To give away thy land,
Come place him here by me,—
Do thou for him stand:
The sweet and bitter fool

---

[1] **owest**: ownest. [2] **goest**: walkest.
[3] **Set less than thou throwest**: that is, don't gamble all your winnings in one throw of the dice. [4] **keep in-a-door**: stay indoors (*and mind your own business*). [5] **like the breath of an unfee'd lawyer**: like the pleadings in your behalf of an unpaid lawyer.
[6] **so much**: how much. [7] **bitter**: sarcastic.

Will presently appear;
The one in motley[1] here,
The other found out there.

KING LEAR.

Dost thou call me fool, boy?

FOOL.

All thy other titles thou hast given away; that thou wast born with.

EARL OF KENT.

This is not altogether fool,[2] my lord.

FOOL.

No, faith, lords and great men will not let me; if I had a monopoly out, they would have part on't:[3] and ladies too, they will not let me have all fool to myself; they'll be snatching.—Give me an egg, nuncle, and I'll give thee two crowns.[4]

KING LEAR.

What two crowns shall they be?

FOOL.

Why, after I have cut the egg i'th'middle, and eat up the meat, the two crowns of the egg. When thou clovest thy crown i'th'middle, and gavest away both parts, thou borest thine ass on thy back o'er the dirt:[5] thou hadst little wit in thy bald crown, when thou gavest thy golden one away. If I speak like myself[6] in this, let him be whipt that first finds it so.[7] [*Singing.*

Fools had ne'er less grace in a year;
For wise men are grown foppish,[8]
And know not how their wits to wear,
Their manners are so apish.[9]

KING LEAR.

When were you wont to be so full of songs, sirrah?

---

[1] **motley**: the particolored garb of a fool (king's jester). [2] **not altogether fool**: not completely foolish. [3] **on't**: of it. [4] **two crowns**: two half-shells. [5] **thou . . . dirt**: a reference to Aesop's fable concerning the man, his two sons, and the ass. [6] **like myself**: i.e., like a fool. [7] **let . . . so**: that is, anyone who condemns the fool's feeling about the distribution of King Lear's kingdom deserves a whipping. [8] **foppish**: foolish. [9] **so apish**: so much like those of a fool.

FOOL.

I have used it, nuncle, ever since thou madest thy daughters thy mothers: for when thou gavest them the rod, and putt'st down thine own breeches, [*Singing.*

Then they for sudden joy did weep,
And I for sorrow sung,
That such a king should play bo-peep,[1]
And go the fools among.

Prithee, nuncle, keep a schoolmaster that can teach thy fool to lie: I would fain learn to lie.

KING LEAR.

An you lie, sirrah, we'll have you whipt.

FOOL.

I marvel what kin thou and thy daughters are: they'll have me whipt for speaking true, thou'lt have me whipt for lying; and sometimes I am whipt for holding my peace. I had rather be any kind o'thing than a fool: and yet I would not be thee, nuncle; thou hast pared thy wit o'both sides, and left nothing i'th'middle:—here comes one o'th'parings.

Enter GONERIL.

KING LEAR.

How now, daughter! what makes that frontlet on?[2] Methinks you are too much of late i'th'frown.[3]

FOOL.

Thou wast a pretty fellow when thou hadst no need to care for her frowning; now thou art an O without a figure:[4] I am better than thou art now; I am a fool, thou art nothing.—[*to* GONERIL] Yes, forsooth, I will hold my tongue; so your face bids me, though you say nothing.

Mum, mum:

---

[1] **bo-peep:** a game somewhat like our present hide-and-seek.
[2] **what makes that frontlet on:** what are you doing with that band on your forehead.
[3] **i'th'frown:** that is, you frown too much.
[4] **an O without a figure:** a mere cipher; a nothing.

He that keeps nor crust nor crum,
Weary of all, shall want some.—
That's a sheal'd peascod.[1] [*Pointing to* LEAR.

GONERIL.

Not only, sir, this your all-licensed fool,
But other of your insolent retinue
Do hourly carp[2] and quarrel; breaking forth
In rank[3] and not-to-be-endured riots. Sir,
I had thought, by making this well known unto you,
To have found a safe redress; but now grow fearful,
By what yourself too late have spoke and done,
That you protect this course, and put it on[4]
By your allowance;[5] which if you should, the fault
Would not scape[6] censure, nor the redresses sleep,
Which, in the tender of a wholesome weal,[7]
Might in their working do you that offence,
Which else were shame, that then necessity
Will call discreet proceeding.

FOOL.

For, you trow,[8] nuncle,
The hedge-sparrow fed the cuckoo so long,
That it had its head bit off by its young.
So, out went the candle, and we were left darkling.[9]

KING LEAR.

Are you our daughter?

GONERIL.

Come, sir,
I would you would make use of that good wisdom
Whereof I know you are fraught;[10] and put away

---

[1] **sheal'd peascod:** shelled or empty peapod. [2] **carp:** find fault. [3] **rank:** excessive. [4] **put it on:** put up with it; encourage it. [5] **allowance:** approval. [6] **scape:** escape. [7] **tender of a wholesome weal:** desire for a healthy state or sound public welfare. [8] **trow:** understand. [9] **darkling:** in the dark. [10] **fraught:** full of.

These dispositions,[1] that of late transform you
From what you rightly are.

FOOL.

May not an ass know when the cart draws the horse?—
Whoop, Jug! [2] I love thee.

KING LEAR.

Doth any here know me?—Why, *this is not Lear*:
Doth Lear walk thus? speak thus? Where are his eyes?
Either his notion[3] weakens, or his discernings
Are lethargied—Ha! waking? 'tis not so.—
Who is it that can tell me who I am?—

FOOL.

Lear's shadow.

KING LEAR.

I would learn that; for, by the marks of sovereignty,
Knowledge, and reason, I should be false-persuaded
I had daughters.

FOOL.

Which they will make an obedient father.

KING LEAR.

Your name, fair gentlewoman?

GONERIL.

This admiration,[4] sir, is much o'th'savour
Of other your new pranks. I do beseech you
To understand my purposes aright:
As you are old and reverend, should be wise.
Here do you keep a hundred knights and squires;
Men so disorder'd, so debosht,[5] and bold,
That this our court, infected with their manners,
Shows like a riotous inn: epicurism and lust

---

[1] **dispositions**: fits of temperament.
[2] **Jug**: a nickname for "Joan" (possibly from an old song).
[3] **notion**: intellectual power or perception.
[4] **admiration**: pretense of astonishment.
[5] **debosht**: debauched.

Makes it more like a tavern or a brothel
Than a graced [1] palace. The shame itself doth speak
For instant remedy: be, then, desired
By her, that else will take the things she begs,
A little to disquantity[2] your train;
And the remainder, that shall still depend,
To be such men as may besort[3] your age,
Which know themselves and you.

KING LEAR.

Darkness and devils!—
Saddle my horses; call my train together.—
Degenerate bastard! I'll not trouble thee:
Yet have I left a daughter.

GONERIL.

You strike my people; and your disorder'd rabble
Make servants of their betters.

Enter ALBANY.

KING LEAR.

Woe,[4] that too late repents,—[*to* ALBANY] O, sir, are you come?
Is it your will? Speak, sir.—Prepare my horses.—
Ingratitude, thou marble-hearted fiend,
More hideous when thou show'st thee in a child
Than the sea-monster!

DUKE OF ALBANY.

Pray, sir be patient.

KING LEAR [*to* GONERIL].

Detested [5] kite![6] thou liest:
My train are men of choice and rarest parts,
That all particulars of duty know,
And in the most exact regard support
The worships[7] of their name.—O most small fault,

---

[1] **graced**: "graced with the presence of a sovereign"—Warburton.
[2] **disquantity**: reduce the size of.
[3] **besort**: consort with; befit.
[4] **Woe**: woe to him. [5] **Detested**: detestable.
[6] **kite**: a thieving bird of the hawk family.
[7] **worships**: honor.

How ugly didst thou in Cordelia show!
Which, like an engine,[1] wrencht my frame of nature
From the fixt place; drew from my heart all love,
And added to the gall. O Lear, Lear, Lear!
Beat at this gate, that let thy folly in, [*Striking his head.*
And thy dear judgement out!—Go, go, my people.

DUKE OF ALBANY.

My lord, I am guiltless, as I am ignorant
Of what hath moved[2] you.

KING LEAR.

It my be so, my lord.—
Hear, nature, hear; dear goddess, hear!
Suspend thy purpose, if thou didst intend
To make this creature fruitful!
Into her womb convey sterility!
Dry up in her the organs of increase;
And from her derogate[3] body never spring
A babe to honour her! If she must teem,[4]
Create her child of spleen; that it may live,
And be a thwart[5] disnatured torment to her!
Let it stamp wrinkles in her brow of youth;
With cadent[6] tears fret[7] channels in her cheeks;
Turn all her mother's pains and benefits
To laughter and contempt,—that she may feel
How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is
To have a thankless child!—Away, away! [*Exit.*

DUKE OF ALBANY.

Now, gods that we adore, whereof comes this?

GONERIL.

Never afflict yourself to know the cause;
But let his disposition have that scope

---

[1] **engine**: machine. [2] **moved**: angered.
[3] **derogate**: degraded; debased.
[4] **teem**: have offspring.
[5] **thwart**: perverse.
[6] **cadent**: falling.
[7] **fret**: wear away.

That dotage gives it.

Enter LEAR.

KING LEAR.

What, fifty of my followers at a clap! [1]
Within a fortnight!

DUKE OF ALBANY.

What's the matter, sir?

KING LEAR.

I'll tell thee.—[*to* GONERIL] Life and death! I am ashamed
That thou hast power to shake my manhood thus;
That these hot tears, which break from me perforce,
Should make thee worth them.—Blasts and fogs upon thee!
Th'untented [2] woundings of a father's curse
Pierce every sense about thee!—Old fond eyes,
Beweep this cause again, I'll pluck ye out,
And cast you, with the waters that you lose,
To temper clay.—Yea, is it come to this?
Let it be so:—I have another daughter,
Who, I am sure, is kind and comfortable:[3]
When she shall hear this of thee, with her nails
She'll flay thy wolvish visage. Thou shalt find
That I'll resume the shape which thou dost think
I have cast off for ever; thou shalt, I warrant thee.

[*Exeunt* LEAR, KENT, *and* ATTENDANTS.

GONERIL.

Do you mark that, my lord?

DUKE OF ALBANY.

I cannot be so partial,[4] Goneril,
To the great love I bear you,—

---

[1] **at a clap:** at once.
[2] **untented:** too deep to be reached *with a tent* (*in surgery, a tent* is a roll of absorbent cotton used to hold open an incision).
[3] **comfortable:** comforting (willing to comfort me).
[4] **partial:** unfeeling.

GONERIL.

Pray you, content.—What, Oswald, hol—
[*to the* FOOL.] You, sir, more knave than fool, after your master.

FOOL.

Nuncle Lear, nuncle Lear, tarry, and take the fool with thee.—

A fox, when one has caught her,
And such a daughter,
Should sure to the slaughter,
If my cap would buy a halter:[1]
So the fool follows after. [*Exit.*

GONERIL.

This man hath had good counsel:—a hundred knights!
'Tis politic[2] and safe to let him keep
At point[3] a hundred knights: yes, that, on every dream,
Each buzz, each fancy, each complaint, dislike,
He may enguard his dotage with their powers,
And hold our lives in mercy.[4]—Oswald, I say!—

DUKE OF ALBANY.

Well, you may fear too far.

GONERIL.

Safer than trust too far:
Let me still[5] take away the harms I fear,
Not fear still to be taken:[6] I know his heart.
What he hath utter'd I have writ my sister:
If she sustain him and his hundred knights,
When I have show'd th'unfitness,—

Enter OSWALD.

How now, Oswald!
What, have you writ that letter to my sister?

---

[1] **halter:** hangman's noose.
[2] **politic:** good policy.
[3] **at point:** at combat readiness.
[4] **in mercy:** at his mercy.
[5] **still:** always.
[6] **to be taken:** to be overtaken (by harm).

OSWALD.

Ay, madam.

GONERIL.

Take you some company, and away to horse:
Inform her full of my particular[1] fear;
And thereto add such reasons of your own
As may compact[2] it more. Get you gone;
And hasten your return. [*Exit* OSWALD.] No, no, my lord,
This milky gentleness and course of yours,
Though I condemn not, yet, under pardon,
You are much more attaskt[3] for want of wisdom
Than praised for harmful mildness.[4]

DUKE OF ALBANY.

How far your eyes may pierce I cannot tell:
Striving to better, oft we mar what's well.

GONERIL.

Nay, then—

DUKE OF ALBANY.

Well, well; the event.[5] [*Exeunt.*

SCENE V.

Court before the same.

Enter LEAR, KENT, *and* FOOL.

KING LEAR.

Go you before to Gloster[6] with these letters. Acquaint my daughter no further with any thing you know than comes from her demand[7] out of the letter. If your diligence be not speedy, I shall be there afore you.

EARL OF KENT.

I will not sleep, my lord, till I have deliver'd your letter.
[*Exit.*

---

[1] **particular**: personal. [2] **compact**: confirm; strengthen.
[3] **attaskt**: taken to task: blamed.
[4] **harmful mildness**: dangerous clemency.
[5] **the event**: the outcome; that is, let us see what happens.
[6] **Gloster**: Gloucester, a village near the Duke's residence.
[7] **demand**: questions for more details.

FOOL.

If a man's brains were in's heels, were't not in danger of kibes? [1]

KING LEAR.

Ay, boy.

FOOL.

Then, I prithee, be merry; thy wit shall ne'er go slip-shod.[2]

KING LEAR.

Ha, ha, ha!

FOOL.

Shalt see thy other daughter will use thee kindly,[3] for though she's as like this as a crab's[4] like an apple, yet I can tell what I can tell.

KING LEAR.

What canst tell, boy?

FOOL.

She will taste as like this as a crab does to a crab. Thou canst tell why one's nose stands i'th middle on's face?

KING LEAR.

No.

FOOL.

Why, to keep one's eyes of either side's nose; that what a man cannot smell out, he may spy into.

KING LEAR.

I did her wrong—

FOOL.

Canst tell how an oyster makes his shell?

KING LEAR.

No.

---

[1] **kibes**: chilblains.

[2] **ne'er go slip-shod**: never wear slippers (the fool means that King Lear has no wit even in his heels if he is contemplating a journey to see Regan).

[3] **kindly**: according to her kind (nature).

[4] **crab**: crab apple.

FOOL.

Nor I neither; but I can tell why a snail has a house.

KING LEAR.

Why?

FOOL.

Why, to put's[1] head in; not to give it away to his daughters, and leave his horns without a case.

KING LEAR.

I will forget my nature.[2]—So kind a father!—Be my horses ready?

FOOL.

Thy asses are gone about 'em. The reason why the seven stars[3] are no more than seven is a pretty reason.

KING LEAR.

Because they are not eight?

FOOL.

Yes, indeed: thou wouldst make a good fool.

KING LEAR.

To take't again perforce![4]—Monster ingratitude!

FOOL.

If thou wert my fool, nuncle. I'ld[5] have thee beaten for being old before thy time.

KING LEAR.

How's that?

FOOL.

Thou shouldst not have been old till thou hadst been wise.

KING LEAR.

O, let me not be mad, not mad, sweet heaven!
Keep me in temper:[6] I would not be mad!

Enter GENTLEMAN.

How now! are the horses ready?

---

[1] put's: put his.
[2] I will forget my nature: I shall stop being a kind father.
[3] seven stars: the constellation of the Pleiades.
[4] To take't again perforce: to take it again by force (Lear is thinking of recapturing his kingdom).
[5] I'ld: I would. [6] in temper: sane; in mental balance.

GENTLEMAN.

Ready, my lord.

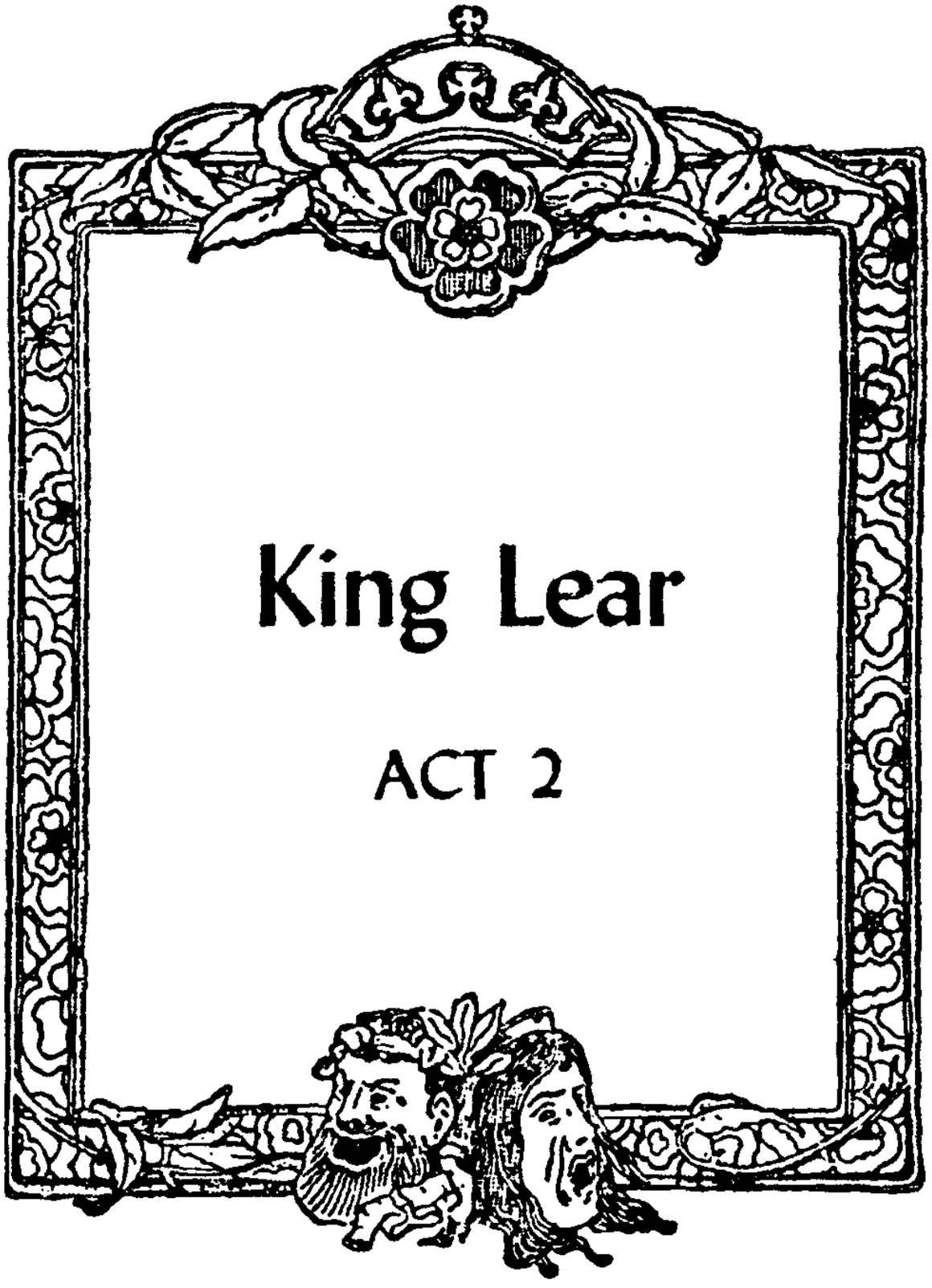
KING LEAR.

Come, boy.

FOOL.

She that's a maid now, and laughs at my departure,
Shall not be a maid long, unless things be cut shorter.

[*Exeunt.*



King Lear

ACT 2

ACT II

EDMUND plays on the credulity of both his father and his brother, causing Gloucester to banish Edgar, and Edgar to hide in a wood in the disguise of a lunatic. Regan and her husband, the Duke of Cornwall, leave home when they hear from Goneril of Lear's approach, and go to Gloucester's castle. Kent, now in disguise as Lear's servant, follows them and is humiliated by being put into the stocks on their orders. When Lear arrives, Regan insists that she will only receive him if he reduces his knightly retinue. Goneril then appears and the cruel sisters tell Lear that he must dispense with his retinue entirely. In rage and bitter resentment, Lear goes out onto the heath on a wild night and the sisters lock the doors of Gloucester's castle against him.

ACT II. SCENE I.

A court within the castle of the EARL OF GLOSTER.

Enter EDMUND *and* CURAN, *meeting.*

EDMUND.

Save thee,[1] Curan.

CURAN.

And you, sir. I have been with your father, and given him notice that the Duke of Cornwall and Regan his duchess will be here with him this night.

EDMUND.

How comes that?

CURAN.

Nay, I know not.—You have heard of the news abroad,—I mean the wisper'd ones, for they are yet but ear-kissing[2] arguments? [3]

EDMUND.

Not I: pray you, what are they?

CURAN.

Have you heard of no likely wars toward [4] 'twixt the Dukes of Cornwall and Albany?

---

[1] **Save thee:** God save you.
[2] **ear-kissing:** whispered secretly.
[3] **arguments:** subjects of conversations.
[4] **toward:** impending.

EDMUND.

Not a word.

CURAN.

You may do, then, in time. Fare you well, sir. [*Exit.*

EDMUND.

The duke be here to-night? The better! [1] best!
This weaves itself perforce into my business.
My father hath set guard to take my brother;
And I have one thing, of a queasy question,[2]
Which I must act:—briefness and fortune, work!—
Brother, a word;—descend:—brother, I say!

Enter EDGAR.

My father watches:—O sir, fly this place;
Intelligence is given where you are hid;
You have now the good advantage of the night:—
Have you not spoken 'gainst the Duke of Cornwall?
He's coming hither; now, i'th'night, i'th'haste,[3]
And Regan with him: have you nothing said
Upon his party 'gainst the Duke of Albany?
Advise yourself.

EDGAR.

I am sure on't,[4] not a word.

EDMUND.

I hear my father coming:—pardon me;
In cunning[5] I must draw my sword upon you:—
Draw: seem to defend yourself: now quit you well.[6]—
Yield:—come before my father.—Light, ho, here!
Fly, brother.—Torches, torches!—So, farewell.

[*Exit* EDGAR.

---

[1] **The better:** all the better. [2] **of a queasy question:** of a delicate nature; that is, it needs careful handling. [3] **i'th'haste:** in the greatest haste. [4] **on't:** of it. [5] **In cunning:** in pretense. [6] **quit you well:** acquit yourself well; defend yourself.

Some blood drawn on me would beget opinion
[*Wounds his arm.*
Of my more fierce endeavour:[1] I have seen drunkards
Do more than this in sport.—Father, father!—
Stop, stop!—No help?

Enter GLOSTER, *and* SERVANTS *with torches.*

EARL OF GLOSTER.

Now, Edmund, where's the villain?

EDMUND.

Here stood he in the dark, his sharp sword out,
Mumbling of wicked charms, conjuring the moon
To stand's auspicious mistress,—[2]

EARL OF GLOSTER.

But where is he?

EDMUND.

Look, sir, I bleed.

EARL OF GLOSTER.

Where is the villain, Edmund?

EDMUND.

Fled this way, sir. When by no means he could—

EARL OF GLOSTER.

Pursue him, ho!—Go after. [*Exeunt some* SERVANTS.]—By no means what?

EDMUND.

Persuade me to the murder of your lordship;
But that I told him the revenging gods
'Gainst parricides did all their thunders bend;
Spoke with how manifold and strong a bond
The child was bound to th'father;—sir, in fine,[3]
Seeing how loathly opposite I stood
To his unnatural purpose, in fell[4] motion,
With his prepared sword he charges home

---

[1] would beget opinion/ Of my more fierce endeavour: would make people think that I had been in a fight for my life.
[2] To stand's auspicious mistress: to sponsor his good fortunes.
[3] in fine: in short.
[4] fell: fierce; deadly.

My unprovided [1] body, lanced mine arm:
But when he saw my best alarum'd spirits,
Bold in the quarrel's right,[2] roused to th'encounter,
Or whether gasted [3] by the noise I made,
Full suddenly he fled.

EARL OF GLOSTER.

Let him fly far:
Not in this land shall he remain uncaught;
And found—dispatch.[4] The noble duke my master,
My worthy arch and patron,[5] comes to-night:
By his authority I will proclaim it,
That he which finds him shall deserve our thanks,
Bringing the murderous coward to the stake;
He that conceals him, death.

EDMUND.

When I dissuaded him from his intent,
And found him pight[6] to do it, with curst speech
I threaten'd to discover[7] him: he replied,
'Thou unpossessing bastard! dost thou think,
If I would stand against thee, would the reposal
Of any trust, virtue, or worth, in thee
Make thy words faith'd? [8] No: what I should deny,—
As this I would; ay, though thou didst produce
My very character,[9]—I'ld turn it all
To thy suggestion, plot, and damned practice:[10]
And thou must make a dullard of the world,
If they not thought the profits of my death
Were very pregnant and potential spurs
To make thee seek it.'

---

[1] **unprovided:** unprotected. [2] **Bold in the quarrel's right:** made bold *in the rightness of my cause.* [3] **gasted:** scared. [4] **And found—dispatch:** and caught up with, killed instantly. [5] **arch and patron:** chief patron (supporter). [6] **pight:** pitched; fully determined. [7] **discover:** expose. [8] ***faith'd:*** *believed.* [9] **character:** handwriting. [10] **practice:** stratagem.

EARL OF GLOSTER.

Strong and fasten'd [1] villain!
Would he deny his letter?—I never got him.—

[*Tucket*[2] *within.*

Hark, the duke's trumpets! I know not why he comes.—
All ports I'll bar; the villain shall not scape;
The duke must grant me that: besides, his picture
I will send far and near, that all the kingdom
May have due note of him; and of my land,
Loyal and natural [3] boy, I'll work the means
To make thee capable.[4]

Enter CORNWALL, REGAN, *and* ATTENDANTS.

DUKE OF CORNWALL.

How now, my noble friend! since I came hither,—
Which I can call but now,—I have heard strange news.

REGAN.

If it be true, all vengeance comes too short
Which can pursue th' offender. How dost, my lord?

EARL OF GLOSTER.

O madam, my old heart is crackt, is crackt!

REGAN.

What, did my father's godson seek your life?
He whom my father named? your Edgar?

EARL OF GLOSTER.

O lady, lady, shame would have it hid!

REGAN.

Was he not companion with the riotous knights
That tend upon my father?

EARL OF GLOSTER.

I know not, madam:—'tis too bad, too bad.

---

[1] **fasten'd:** hardened.
[2] **Tucket:** flourish of trumpets.
[3] **natural:** born out of wedlock.
[4] **capable:** able to inherit; legal heir.

EDMUND.

Yes, madam, he was of that consort.[1]

REGAN.

No marvel, then, though he were ill affected:[2]
'Tis they have put him on[3] the old man's death,
To have th'expense and waste of his revenues.
I have this present evening from my sister
Been well inform'd of them; and with such cautions,
That if they come to sojourn at my house,
I'll not be there.

DUKE OF CORNWALL.

Nor I, assure thee, Regan.—
Edmund, I hear that you have shown your father
A child-like office.[4]

EDMUND.

'Twas my duty, sir.

EARL OF GLOSTER.

He did bewray his practice:[5] and received
This hurt you see, striving to apprehend him.

DUKE OF CORNWALL.

Is he pursued?

EARL OF GLOSTER.

Ay, my good lord.

DUKE OF CORNWALL.

If he be taken, he shall never more
Be fear'd of doing harm: make your own purpose,
How in my strength you please.[6]—For you, Edmund,
Whose virtue and obedience doth this instant
So much commend itself, you shall be ours:
Nature of such deep trust we shall much need;
You we first seize on.

---

[1] consort: set; company. [2] ill affected: disloyal. [3] put him on: incited him to. [4] child-like office: filial service. [5] bewray his practice: expose his plot. [6] make your own purpose,/ How in my strength you please: in executing your desires in the matter, you may count on all my resources.

EDMUND.

I shall serve you, sir,
Truly, however else.

EARL OF GLOSTER.

For him I thank your Grace.

DUKE OF CORNWALL.

You know not why we came to visit you,—

REGAN.

Thus out of season, threading dark-eyed night:
Occasions, noble Gloster, of some poise,[1]
Wherein we must have use of your advice:—
Our father he hath writ, so hath our sister,
Of differences,[2] which I best thought it fit
To answer from[3] our home; the several messengers
From hence attend dispatch.[4] Our good old friend,
Lay comforts to your bosom; and bestow
Your needful counsel to our business,
Which craves the instant use.[5]

EARL OF GLOSTER.

I serve you, madam:
Your Graces are right welcome. [*Exeunt.*

SCENE II.

Before GLOSTER'S *castle.*

Enter KENT *and* OSWALD, *severally.*

OSWALD.

Good dawning to thee, friend: art of this house?

EARL OF KENT.

Ay.

OSWALD.

Where may we set our horses?

EARL OF KENT.

I'the mire.

---

[1] **poise:** importance; weight.
[2] **differences:** quarrels.
[3] **from:** away from.
[4] **attend dispatch:** are waiting to be sent back.
[5] **the instant use:** immediate attention.

OSWALD.

Prithee, if thou lovest me, tell me.

EARL OF KENT.

I love thee not.

OSWALD.

Why, then, I care not for thee.

EARL OF KENT.

If I had thee in Lipsbury pinfold,[1] I would make thee care for me.

OSWALD.

Why dost thou use me thus? I know thee not.

EARL OF KENT.

Fellow, I know thee.

OSWALD.

What dost thou know me for?

EARL OF KENT.

A knave; a rascal; an eater of broken meats;[2] a base, proud, shallow, beggarly, three-suited, hundred-pound, filthy, worsted-stocking knave;[3] a lily-liver'd, action-taking,[4] whoreson, glass-gazing,[5] superserviceable,[6] finical[7] rogue; one-trunk-inheriting slave;[8] one that wouldst be a bawd in way of good service, and art nothing but the composition[9] of a knave, beggar, coward, pander,[10] and the son and heir of a mongrel bitch: one whom I will beat into clamorous whining, if thou deniest the least syllable of thy addition.[11]

OSWALD.

Why, what a monstrous fellow art thou, thus to rail on one that is neither known of thee nor knows thee!

---

[1] **Lipsbury pinfold:** *Lipsbury* seems to be a place-name of the fool's own coinage; *pinfold* was a pound or pen for stray animals. [2] **broken meats:** scraps. [3] **three-suited . . . knave:** a man allowed only three suits of clothing a year, wages of 100 pounds, and who wears worsted stockings. [4] **action-taking:** a man who takes his troubles to court. [5] **glass-gazing:** vain. [6] **superserviceable:** officious. [7] **finical:** affectedly nice. [8] **one-trunk-slave:** of poor inheritance. [9] **composition:** mixture. [10] **pander:** procurer. [11] **thy addition:** these titles.

EARL OF KENT.

What a brazen-faced varlet[1] art thou, to deny thou knowest me! Is it two days since I tript up thy heels, and beat thee, before the king? Draw, you rogue: for, though it be night, yet the moon shines: I'll make a sop o'the moonshine of you:[2] draw, you whoreson cullionly[3] barbermonger,[4] draw.

[*Drawing his sword.*

OSWALD.

Away! I have nothing to do with thee.

EARL OF KENT.

Draw, you rascal: you come with letters against the king; and take Vanity the puppet's[5] part against the royalty of her father: draw, you rogue, or I'll so carbonado[6] your shanks:—draw, you rascal; come your ways.[7]

OSWALD.

Help, ho! murder! help!

EARL OF KENT.

Strike, you slave; stand, rogue, stand; you neat[8] slave, strike.

[*Beating him.*

OSWALD.

Help, ho! murder! murder!

Enter EDMUND, *with his rapier drawn.*

EDMUND.

How now! What's the matter? [*Parts them.*

EARL OF KENT.

With you, goodman boy, an you please: come,
I'll flesh[9] you; come on, young master.

Enter CORNWALL, REGAN, GLOSTER, *and* SERVANTS.

EARL OF GLOSTER.

Weapons! arms! What's the matter here?

---

[1] **varlet:** contemptible fellow; rascal. [2] **I'll . . . you:** I'll pierce you with holes and let the moonlight soak into you. [3] **cullionly:** rascally. [4] **barbermonger:** frequent visitor to the barber shop. [5] **Vanity the puppet:** Goneril. [6] **carbonado:** meat cut crosswise for broiling. [7] **come your ways:** come along. [8] **neat:** foppish. [9] **flesh:** initiate (to his first taste of bloodshed).

DUKE OF CORNWALL.

Keep peace, upon your lives;
He dies that strikes again. What is the matter?

REGAN.

The messengers from our sister and the king.

DUKE OF CORNWALL.

What is your difference? [1] speak.

OSWALD.

I am scarce in breath, my lord.

EARL OF KENT.

No marvel, you have so bestirr'd your valour. You cowardly rascal, nature disclaims in thee:[2] a tailor made thee.

DUKE OF CORNWALL.

Thou art a strange fellow: a tailor make a man?

EARL OF KENT.

Ay, a tailor, sir: a stone-cutter or a painter could not have made him so ill, though they had been but two hours at the trade.

DUKE OF CORNWALL.

Speak yet, how grew your quarrel?

OSWALD.

This ancient ruffian, sir, whose life I have spared at suit of his gray beard,[3]—

EARL OF KENT.

Thou whoreson zed! [4] thou unnecessary letter!—My lord, if you will give me leave, I will tread this unbolted [5] villain into mortar, and daub the wall of a jakes[6] with him.—'Spare my gray beard,' you wagtail? [7]

DUKE OF CORNWALL.

Peace, sirrah!
You beastly knave, know you no reverance?

---

[1] **difference:** quarrel-disagreement. [2] **nature disclaims in thee:** nature renounces all claim to any part of you. [3] **at . . . beard:** because of his advanced years. [4] **zed:** for the letter Z; considered an unnecessary letter, it became the symbol for a social parasite. [5] **unbolted:** literally, unsifted, but here the meaning is "complete." [6] **jakes:** a privy. [7] **wagtail:** an impudent small bird.

EARL OF KENT.

Yes, sir; but anger hath a privilege.

DUKE OF CORNWALL.

Why art thou angry?

EARL OF KENT.

That such a slave as this should wear a sword,
Who wears no honesty.[1] Such smiling rogues as these,
Like rats, oft bite the holy cords[2] a-twain
Which are too intrinse[3] t'unloose; smooth every passion
That in the natures of their lords rebel,
Bring oil to fire, snow to their colder moods;
Renege,[4] affirm, and turn their halcyon beaks[5]
With every gale and vary of their masters,
Knowing naught, like dogs, but following.—
A plague upon your epileptic visage!
Smile you[6] my speeches, as I were a fool?
Goose, if I had you upon Sarum plain,[7]
I'ld drive ye cackling home to Camelot.

DUKE OF CORNWALL.

What, art thou mad, old fellow?

EARL OF GLOSTER.

How fell you out? say that.

EARL OF KENT.

No contraries[8] hold more antipathy
Than I and such a knave.

DUKE OF CORNWALL.

Why dost thou call him knave? What's his offence?

EARL OF KENT.

His countenance likes me not.[9]

---

[1] **honesty:** honor. [2] **holy cords:** bonds of close friendship. [3] **intrinse:** tightly drawn. [4] **Renege:** deny. [5] **halcyon beaks:** an allusion to the superstition that the kingfisher, if suspended by the tail or beak, would turn with the wind. [6] **smile you:** do you smile at. [7] **Sarum plain:** Salisbury Plain. [8] **contraries:** two different people. [9] **His . . . not:** his behavior does not please me.

DUKE OF CORNWALL.

No more, perchance, does mine, nor his, nor hers.

EARL OF KENT.

Sir, 'tis my occupation to be plain:[1]
I have seen better faces in my time
Than stands on any shoulder that I see
Before me at this instant.

DUKE OF CORNWALL.

This is some fellow,
Who, having been praised for bluntness, doth affect
A saucy roughness, and constrains the garb
Quite from his nature:[2] he cannot flatter, he,—
An honest mind and plain,—he must speak truth!
An they will take it, so; if not, he's plain.
These kind of knaves I know, which in this plainness
Harbour more craft and more corrupter ends
Than twenty silly-ducking observants[3]
That stretch their duties nicely.[4]

EARL OF KENT.

Sir, in good sooth, in sincere verity,
Under the allowance of your great aspect,
Whose influence, like the wreath of radiant fire
On flickering Phœbus' front,—[5]

DUKE OF CORNWALL.

What mean'st by this?

EARL OF KENT.

To go out of my dialect, which you discommend[6] so much. I know, sir, I am no flatterer: he that beguiled you in a plain accent was a plain knave; which, for my part, I will not be, though I should win your displeasure to entreat me to't.

---

[1] **plain**: frank; plain-spoken. [2] **constrains . . . nature**: forces himself into an appearance and behavior quite different from his true nature. [3] **silly-ducking observants**: courtiers who bow at the slightest provocation. [4] **stretch their duties nicely**: perform their courtly duties meticulously. [5] **Phœbus' front**: the sun god's forehead. [6] **discommend**: disapprove of. [7] **though . . . to't**: I will not be a knave though I incur your displeasure in refusing to do so.

DUKE OF CORNWALL.

What was the offence you gave him?

OSWALD.

I never gave him any:
It pleased the king his master very late
To strike at me, upon his misconstruction;[1]
When he, conjunct,[2] and flattering his displeasure,
Tript me behind; being down, insulted, rail'd,
And put upon him such a deal of man,[3]
That worthied him, got praises of the king
For him attempting who was self-subdued;
And, in the fleshment[4] of this dread exploit,
Drew on me here again.

EARL OF KENT.

None of these rogues and cowards
But Ajax is their fool.[5]

DUKE OF CORNWALL.

Fetch forth the stocks!—
You stubborn ancient knave, you reverend [6] braggart,
We'll teach you—

EARL OF KENT.

Sir, I am too old to learn:
Call not your stocks for me: I serve the king;
On whose employment I was sent to you:
You shall do small respect, show too bold malice[7]
Against the grace and person[8] of my master,
Stocking his messenger.

DUKE OF CORNWALL.

Fetch forth the stocks!—As I have life and honour,
There shall he sit till noon.

REGAN.

Till noon! till night, my lord; and all night too.

---

[1] misconstruction: misunderstanding; misinterpretation. [2] conjunct: in league with the king. [3] put . . . man: made such a show of being a hero. [4] in the fleshment: in the exultation of drawing first blood. [5] But Ajax is their fool: Ajax is a weakling beside them. [6] reverend: old. [7] bold malice: obvious spite. [8] grace and person: an insult to the crown as well as a personal insult.

EARL OF KENT.

Why, madam, if I were your father's dog,
You should not use me so.

REGAN.

Sir, being his knave, I will.

DUKE OF CORNWALL.

This is a fellow of the self-same colour[1]
Our sister speaks of.—Come, bring away[2] the stocks!

[*Stocks brought out.*

EARL OF GLOSTER.

Let me beseech your Grace not to do so:
His fault is much, and the good king his master
Will check[3] him for't: your purposed low correction[4]
Is such as basest and contemned'st[5] wretches
For pilferings and most common trespasses
Are punisht with: the king must take it ill,
That he, so slightly valued in his messenger,
Should have him thus restrain'd.

DUKE OF CORNWALL.

I'll answer that.[6]

REGAN.

My sister may receive it much more worse,
To have her gentleman abused, assaulted,
For following her affairs.—Put in his legs.—

[KENT *is put in the stocks.*

Come, my good lord, away.

[*Exeunt all but* GLOSTER *and* KENT.

EARL OF GLOSTER.

I am sorry for thee, friend; 'tis the duke's pleasure,
Whose disposition, all the world well knows,
Will not be rubb'd [7] nor stopt: I'll entreat for thee.

---

[1] **colour:** ilk; kind. [2] **bring away:** bring along. [3] **check:** rebuke. [4] **low correction:** undignified punishment. [5] **contemned'st:** most despised. [6] **I'll answer that:** I'll take the responsibility for that. [7] **rubb'd:** impeded; checked.

EARL OF KENT.

Pray, do not, sir: I have watcht,[1] and travell'd hard;
Some time I shall sleep out, the rest I'll whistle.
A good man's fortune may grow out at heels:[2]
Give[3] you good morrow!

EARL OF GLOSTER.

The duke's to blame in this; 'twill be ill taken. [*Exit.*

EARL OF KENT.

Good king, that must approve the common saw,[4]—
Thou out of heaven's benediction comest
To the warm sun![5]
Approach, thou beacon to this under globe,[6]
That by thy comfortable beams I may
Peruse this letter!—Nothing almost sees miracles
But misery:—I know 'tis from Cordelia,
Who hath most fortunately been inform'd
Of my obscured course;[7] and shall find time
From this enormous[8] state, seeking to give
Losses their remedies.—All weary and o'er-watcht,
Take vantage, heavy eyes, not to behold
This shameful lodging.
Fortune, good night: smile once more; turn thy wheel!

[*Sleeps.*

SCENE III.

The open country.

Enter EDGAR.

EDGAR.

I heard myself proclaim'd;
And by the happy[9] hollow of a tree
Escaped the hunt. No port is free; no place,
That guard, and most unusual vigilance,
Does not attend my taking.[10] While I may scape,

---

[1] **watcht:** gone without sleep. [2] **A good man's . . . heels:** even a good man may come to a shabby plight. [3] **give:** God give. [4] **saw:** proverb. [5] **Thou . . . sun:** you are coming out of the shade into the heat. [6] **beacon . . . globe:** *rising sun.* [7] **obscured course:** actions in disguise. [8] **enormous:** out of the norm: lawless. [9] **happy:** lucky. [10] **taking:** capture.

I will preserve myself: and am bethought
To take the basest and most poorest shape
That ever penury, in contempt of man,
Brought near to beast: my face I'll grime with filth;
Blanket my loins; elf [1] all my hair in knots;
And with presented [2] nakedness out-face[3]
The winds and persecutions of the sky.
The country gives me proof [4] and precedent
Of Bedlam beggars,[5] who, with roaring voices,
Strike in their numb'd and mortified [6] bare arms
Pins, wooden pricks, nails, sprigs of rosemary;
And with this horrible object, from low[7] farms,
Poor pelting[8] villages, sheep-cotes, and mills,
Sometime with lunatic bans,[9] sometime with prayers,
Enforce their charity.—'Poor Turlygod! poor Tom!' [10]
That's something yet:—Edgar I nothing am. [*Exit.*

Scene IV.

Before Gloster's *castle;* Kent *in the stocks.*

Enter Lear, Fool, *and* Gentleman.

King Lear.

'Tis strange that they should so depart from home,
And not send back my messenger.

Gentleman.

As I learn'd,
The night before there was no purpose[11] in them
Of this remove.

---

[1] **elf:** mat his hair into elflocks (believed to be the work of fairies). [2] **presented:** exposed. [3] **out-face:** brave. [4] **proof:** example. [5] **Bedlam beggars:** beggars dismissed from the lunatic asylum. [6] **numb'd and mortified:** rendered insensible. [7] **low:** lowly. [8] **pelting:** paltry. [9] **bans:** curses. [10] **'Poor Turlygod! poor Tom!':** the beggar's cry for alms. [11] **purpose:** intention.

EARL OF KENT.

Hail to thee, noble master!

KING LEAR.

Ha!
Makest thou this shame thy pastime?

EARL OF KENT.

No, my lord.

FOOL.

Ha, ha! he wears cruel [1] garters. Horses are tied by the heads, dogs and bears by the neck, monkeys by the loins, and men by the legs: when a man's over-lusty at legs,[2] then he wears wooden nether-stocks.[3]

KING LEAR.

What's he that hath so much thy place mistook[4]
To set thee here?

EARL OF KENT.

It is both he and she,—
Your son and daughter.

KING LEAR.

No.

EARL OF KENT.

Yes.

KING LEAR.

No, I say.

EARL OF KENT.

I say, yea.

KING LEAR.

No, no they would not.

EARL OF KENT.

Yes, they have.

KING LEAR.

By Jupiter, I swear, no.

---

[1] **cruel**: a pun on *crewel* (worsted yarn) and *cruel*.
[2] **over-lusty at legs**: that is, gets around too much.
[3] **nether-stocks**: stockings.
[4] **thy place mistook**: underestimated your position.

EARL OF KENT.

By Juno, I swear, ay.

KING LEAR.

They durst not do't;
They could not, would not do't; 'tis worse than murder,
To do upon respect such violent outrage:[1]
Resolve me,[2] with all modest[3] haste, which way
Thou mightst deserve, or they impose, this usage,
Coming from us.

EARL OF KENT.

My lord, when at their home
I did commend your highness' letters to them,
Ere I was risen from the place that show'd
My duty kneeling, came there a reeking post,[4]
Stew'd in his haste, half breathless, panting forth
From Goneril his mistress salutations;
Deliver'd letters, spite of intermission,[5]
Which presently they read: on whose contents,
They summon'd up their meiny,[6] straight[7] took horse;
Commanded me to follow, and attend [8]
The leisure of their answer; gave me cold looks:
And meeting here the other messenger,
Whose welcome, I perceived, had poison'd mine,—
Being the very fellow which of late
Display'd so saucily against your highness,—
Having more man than wit[9] about me, drew:
He raised the house with loud and coward cries.
Your son and daughter found this trespass worth
The shame which here it suffers.

---

[1] **To do upon respect such violent outrage:** to subject the king's messenger to such an *indignity*. [2] **resolve me:** *inform me.* [3] **modest:** sober. [4] **reeking post:** *sweating messenger.* [5] **spite of intermission:** *interrupting the reading of my letter.* [6] **meiny:** menials; attendants. [7] **straight:** immediately. [8] **attend:** await. [9] **more man than wit:** more courage than sense.

FOOL.

Winter's not gone yet, if the wild-geese fly that way.
Fathers that wear rags
Do make their children blind;
But fathers that bear bags[1]
Shall see their children kind.
Fortune, that arrant whore,
Ne'er turns the key[2] to the poor.—
But, for all this, thou shalt have as many dolours[3] for thy daughters as thou canst tell in a year.

KING LEAR.

O, how this mother[4] swells up toward my heart!
Hysterica passio,—down, thou climbing sorrow,
Thy element's[5] below!—Where is this daughter?

EARL OF KENT.

With the earl, sir, here within.

KING LEAR.

Follow me not;
Stay here. [*Exit.*

GENTLEMAN.

Made you no more offence but what you speak of?

EARL OF KENT.

None.
How chance the king comes with so small a train? [6]

FOOL.

An thou hadst been set i'the stocks for that question, thou hadst well deserved it.

EARL OF KENT.

Why, fool?

FOOL.

We'll set thee to school to an ant,[7] to teach thee there's no labouring i'the winter. All that follow their noses are led by

---

[1] **bags:** moneybags. [2] **turns the key:** opens the door. [3] **dolours:** sorrows (with a pun on *dollars*). [4] ***mother:*** the malady *hysterica passio*, a nervous ailment characterized by a choking sensation. [5] ***element:*** proper or natural place. [6] ***train:*** retinue. [7] **ant:** the fool implies that in the winter of King Lear's misfortune his followers have deserted him because of lean pickings.

their eyes but blind men; and there's not a nose among twenty but can smell him that's stinking. Let go thy hold when a great wheel runs down a hill, lest it break thy neck with following it; but the great one that goes up the hill, let him draw thee after. When a wise man gives thee better counsel, give me mine again: I would have none but knaves follow it, since a fool gives it.

That sir which serves and seeks for gain,
And follows but for form,
Will pack when it begins to rain,
And leave thee in the storm.
But I will tarry; the fool will stay,
And let the wise man fly:
The knave turns fool that runs away:
The fool no knave, perdy.[1]

EARL OF KENT.

Where learn'd you this, fool?

FOOL.

Not i'the stocks, fool.

Enter LEAR *with* GLOSTER.

KING LEAR.

Deny[2] to speak with me? They are sick? they are weary?
They have travell'd all the night? Mere fetches;[3]
The images[4] of revolt and flying-off.[5]
Fetch me a better answer.

EARL OF GLOSTER.

My dear lord,
You know the fiery quality[6] of the duke;
How unremovable and fixt he is
In his own course.

---

[1] **perdy:** by God; *pardieu.*
[2] **Deny:** *refuse.*
[3] **fetches:** tricks; subterfuges; excuses.
[4] **images:** signs.
[5] **flying-off:** desertion.
[6] **quality:** nature; temperament.

KING LEAR.

Vengeance! plague! death! confusion!—
Fiery? what quality? Why, Gloster, Gloster,
I'ld speak with the Duke of Cornwall and his wife.

EARL OF GLOSTER.

Well, my good lord, I have inform'd them so.

KING LEAR.

Inform'd them! Dost thou understand me, man?

EARL OF GLOSTER.

Ay, my good lord.

KING LEAR.

The king would speak with Cornwall; the dear father
Would with his daughter speak, commands her service:
Are they inform'd of this?—My breath and blood!—
Fiery! the fiery duke!—Tell the hot[1] duke that—
No, but not yet:—may be he is not well:
Infirmity doth still neglect all office
Whereto our health is bound;[2] we are not ourselves
When nature, being opprest, commands the mind
To suffer with the body; I'll forbear;
And am faln out with my more headier will,[3]
To take the indisposed and sickly fit
For the sound man.—Death on my state! wherefore
[*Looking on* KENT.
Should he sit here? This act persuades me
That this remotion[4] of the duke and her
Is practice[5] only. Give me my servant forth.[6]
Go tell the duke and's wife I'ld speak with them,
Now, presently: bid them come forth and hear me,

---

[1] **hot:** hotheaded. [2] **Infirmity doth still neglect all office/Whereunto our health is bound:** neglect of duty may be expected from a sick man. [3] **am faln out with my more headier will:** am regretting my rash impulse. [4] **remotion:** removal. [5] **practice:** trickery; pretense. [6] **Give me my servant forth:** release my servant from the stocks at once.

Or at their chamber-door I'll beat the drum
Till it cry sleep to death.

EARL OF GLOSTER.

I would have all well betwixt you. [*Exit.*

KING LEAR.

O me, my heart, my rising heart!—but, down!

FOOL.

Cry to it, nuncle, as the cockney[1] did to the eels when she put 'em i'the paste[2] alive; she knapt[3] 'em o'the coxcombs with a stick, and cried, 'Down, wantons, down!' 'Twas her brother that, in pure kindness to his horse, butter'd his hay.

Enter CORNWALL, REGAN, GLOSTER, *and* SERVANTS.

KING LEAR.

Good morrow to you both.

DUKE OF CORNWALL.

Hail to your Grace!

[KENT *here set at liberty.*

REGAN.

I am glad to see your highness.

KING LEAR.

Regan, I think you are; I know what reason
I have to think so: if thou shouldst not be glad,
I would divorce me from thy mother's tomb,
Sepulchring[4] an adultress.—[*to* KENT] O, are you free?
Some other time for that.—Beloved Regan,
Thy sister's naught:[5] O Regan, she hath tied
Sharp-tootht unkindness, like a vulture,[6] here,—

[*Points to his heart.*

I can scarce speak to thee; thou'lt not believe
Of how depraved a quality[7]—O Regan!

---

[1] **cockney:** Londoner. [2] **paste:** pie pastry. [3] **knapt:** rapped; cracked. [4] **Sepulchring:** as being the sepulcher of. [5] **naught:** wicked. [6] **like a vulture:** a reference to the torment of Prometheus, whose liver was devoured by a vulture as fast as it was renewed. [7] **quality:** manner.

REGAN.

I pray you, sir, take patience: I have hope
You less know how to value her desert
Than she to scant[1] her duty.

KING LEAR.

Say, how is that?

REGAN.

I cannot think my sister in the least
Would fail her obligation: if, sir, perchance
She have[2] restrain'd the riots of your followers,
'Tis on such ground, and to such wholesome end,
As clears her from all blame.

KING LEAR.

My curses on her!

REGAN.

O, sir, you are old;
Nature in you stands on the very verge
Of her confine:[3] you should be ruled, and led
By some discretion[4] that discerns your state
Better than you yourself. Therefore, I pray you,
That to our sister you do make return;
Say you have wrong'd her, sir.

KING LEAR.

Ask her forgiveness?
Do you but mark how this becomes the house:[5]
'Dear daughter, I confess that I am old; [*Kneeling.*
Age is unnecessary: on my knees I beg
That you'll vouchsafe[6] me raiment, bed, and food.'

REGAN.

Good sir, no more; these are unsightly tricks:
Return you to my sister.

---

[1] scant: neglect. [2] have: has. [3] Nature in you stands on the very verge/Of her confine: your life is nearing its assigned limit. [4] some discretion: some discreet person. [5] house: the royal house; the dignity of a king. [6] vouchsafe: condescend to grant.

KING LEAR [*rising*].

Never, Regan:
She hath abated [1] me of half my train;[2]
Lookt black upon me; struck me with her tongue,
Most serpent-like, upon the very heart:—
All the stored vengeances of heaven fall
On her ingrateful top! [3] Strike her young bones,[4]
You taking[5] airs, with lameness!

DUKE OF CORNWALL.

Fie, sir, fie!

KING LEAR.

You nimble lightnings, dart your blinding flames
Into her scornful eyes! Infect her beauty,
You fen-suckt fogs,[6] drawn by the powerful sun,
To fall and blast her pride!

REGAN.

O the blest gods! so will you wish on me,
When the rash mood is on.

KING LEAR.

No, Regan, thou shalt never have my curse:
Thy tender-hefted [7] nature shall not give
Thee o'er to harshness: her eyes are fierce; but thine
Do comfort, and not burn. 'Tis not in thee
To grudge my pleasures, to cut off my train,
To bandy hasty words, to scant my sizes,[8]
And, in conclusion, to oppose the bolt[9]
Against my coming in: thou better know'st
The offices of nature, bond of childhood,
Effects of courtesy,[10] dues of gratitude;
Thy half o'the kingdom hast thou not forgot,
Wherein I thee endow'd.

REGAN.

Good sir, to the purpose.

---

[1] **abated**: deprived; reduced. [2] **train**: retinue. [3] **ingrateful top**: ungrateful head. [4] **her young bones**: her unborn progeny. [5] **taking**: infecting. [6] **fen-suckt fogs**: fogs sucked up from the fen (swamp) by the sun. [7] **tender-hefted**: delicately framed. [8] **scant my sizes**: cut my allowance. [9] **oppose the bolt**: lock or bolt the door. [10] **Effects of courtesy**: courteous behavior.

KING LEAR.

Who put my man i'the stocks? [*Tucket within.*

DUKE OF CORNWALL.

What trumpet's that?

REGAN.

I know't,—my sister's: this approves[1] her letter,
That she would soon be here.

Enter OSWALD.

Is your lady come?

KING LEAR.

This is a slave, whose easy-borrow'd pride
Dwells in the fickle grace of her he follows.—
Out, varlet, from my sight!

DUKE OF CORNWALL.

What means your Grace?

KING LEAR.

Who stockt my servant? Regan, I have good hope
Thou didst not know on't.[2]—Who comes here? O heavens,

Enter GONERIL.

If you do love old men, if your sweet sway
Allow[3] obedience, if yourselves are old,
Make it your cause; send down, and take my part!—
[*to* GONERIL] Art not ashamed to look upon this beard?—
O Regan, wilt thou take her by the hand?

GONERIL.

Why not by the hand, sir? How have I offended?
All's not offence that indiscretion finds
And dotage terms so.[4]

KING LEAR.

O sides, you are too tough;[5]
Will you yet hold?—How came my man i'the stocks?

---

[1] **approves:** confirms.
[2] **on't:** of it.
[3] **Allow:** approves of.
[4] **And dotage terms so:** because a foolish old man says it is.
[5] **O sides, you are too tough:** *Lear's physical suffering is becoming greater.*

DUKE OF CORNWALL.

I set him there, sir: but his own disorders[1]
Deserved much less advancement.

KING LEAR.

You! did you?

REGAN.

I pray you, father, being weak, seem so.
If, till the expiration of your month,
You will return and sojourn with my sister,
Dismissing half your train, come then to me:
I am now from home, and out of that provision
Which shall be needful for your entertainment.[2]

KING LEAR.

Return to her, and fifty men dismist?
No, rather I abjure[3] all roofs, and choose
To wake against the enmity o'the air;
To be a comrade with the wolf and owl,—
Necessity's sharp pinch! Return with her?
Why, the hot-blooded[4] France, that dowerless took
Our youngest born, I could as well be brought
To knee his throne,[5] and, squire-like, pension beg
To keep base life afoot.—Return with her?
Persuade me rather to be slave and sumpter[6]
To this detested groom. [*Pointing at* OSWALD.

GONERIL.

At your choice, sir.

KING LEAR.

I prithee, daughter, do not make me mad:
I will not trouble thee, my child; farewell:
We'll no more meet, no more see one another:—
But yet thou art my flesh, my blood, my daughter;

---

[1] **disorders:** misconduct.
[2] **entertainment:** welfare.
[3] **abjure:** renounce.
[4] **hot-blooded:** passionate.
[5] **To knee his throne:** on my knees to his throne.
[6] **sumpter:** packhorse, or packhorse driver.

Or rather a disease that's in my flesh,
Which I must needs call mine: thou art a boil,
A plague-sore, an embossed [1] carbuncle,
In my corrupted blood. But I'll not chide thee;
Let shame come when it will, I do not call it:
I do not bid the thunder-bearer[2] shoot,
Nor tell tales of thee to high-judging Jove:
Mend when thou canst; be better at thy leisure:
I can be patient; I can stay with Regan,
I and my hundred knights.

REGAN.

Not altogether so:
I lookt not for you yet, nor am provided
For your fit welcome. Give ear, sir, to my sister;
For those that mingle reason with your passion
Must be content to think you old, and so—
But she knows what she does.

KING LEAR.

Is this well spoken?

REGAN.

I dare avouch it, sir: what! fifty followers?
Is it not well? [3] What should you need of more?
Yea, or so many, sith that[4] both charge and danger
Speak 'gainst so great a number? How, in one house,
Should many people, under two commands,
Hold amity? 'Tis hard; almost impossible.

GONERIL.

Why might not you, my lord, receive attendance
From those that she calls servants or from mine?

REGAN.

Why not, my lord? If then they chanced to slack you,[5]

---

[1] embossed: swollen.
[2] thunder-bearer: Jupiter.
[3] Is it not well: is that not enough.
[4] sith that: since.
[5] to slack you: not to give you the proper service.

We could control them. If you will come to me,—
For now I spy a danger,—I entreat *you*
To bring but five-and-twenty: to no more
Will I give place or notice.[1]

KING LEAR.

I gave *you* all—

REGAN.

And in good time you gave it.

KING LEAR.

Made you my guardians, my depositaries;[2]
But kept a reservation to be follow'd
With such a number. What, must I come to you
With five-and-twenty, Regan? said *you so*?

REGAN.

And speak't again, my lord; no more with me.

KING LEAR.

Those wicked creatures yet do look well-favour'd,[3]
When others are more wicked; not being the worst
Stands in some rank[4] of praise.—[*to* GONERIL] I'll go with thee:
Thy fifty yet doth double five-and-twenty,
And thou art twice her love.

GONERIL.

Hear me, my lord:
What need you five-and-twenty, ten, or five,
To follow in a house where twice so[5] many
Have a command to tend you?

REGAN.

What *need one*?

KING LEAR.

O, reason[6] not the need: our basest beggars
Are in the poorest thing superfluous:
Allow not nature more than nature needs,

---

[1] **notice:** countenance.
[2] **guardians . . . depositaries:** stewardesses and trustees.
[3] **well-favour'd:** good looking.
[4] **rank:** degree.
[5] **so:** as.
[6] **reason:** argue.

Man's life is cheap as beast's: thou art a lady;
If only to go warm were gorgeous,
Why, nature needs not what thou gorgeous wear'st,
Which scarcely keeps thee warm.—But, for true need,—
You heavens, give me that patience, patience I need!
You see me here, you gods, a poor old man,
As full of grief as age; wretched in both!
If it be you that stir these daughters' hearts
Against their father, fool me not so much[1]
To bear it tamely; touch me with noble anger,
And let not women's weapons, water-drops,[2]
Stain my man's cheeks!—No, you unnatural hags,
I will have such revenges on you both,
That all the world shall—I will do such things,—
What they are, yet I know not; but they shall be
The terrors of the earth. You think I'll weep;
No, I'll not weep:—
I have full cause of [3] weeping; but this heart
Shall break into a hundred thousand flaws,[4]
Or e'er[5] I'll weep.—O fool, I shall go mad!

[*Exeunt* LEAR, GLOSTER, KENT, *and* FOOL.

Storm and tempest.

DUKE OF CORNWALL.

Let us withdraw; 'twill be a storm.

REGAN.

This house is little: the old man and his people
Cannot be well bestow'd.[6]

GONERIL.

'Tis his own blame;[7] 'hath[8] put himself from rest,
And must needs taste his folly.

---

[1] **fool me not so much:** let me not be such a fool as. [2] **water-drops:** tears. [3] **of:** for. [4] **flaws:** fragments; broken pieces. [5] **Or e'er:** before. [6] **well bestow'd:** well lodged. [7] **blame:** fault. [8] **'hath:** he has.

REGAN.

For his particular,[1] I'll receive him gladly,
But not one follower.

GONERIL.

So am I purposed.
Where is my Lord of Gloster?

DUKE OF CORNWALL.

Follow'd the old man forth:—he is return'd.

Enter GLOSTER.

EARL OF GLOSTER.

The king is in high rage.

DUKE OF CORNWALL.

Whither is he going?

EARL OF GLOSTER.

He calls to horse; but will I know not whither.

DUKE OF CORNWALL.

'Tis best to give him way;[2] he leads himself.[3]

GONERIL.

My lord, entreat him by no means to stay.

EARL OF GLOSTER.

Alack, the night comes on, and the bleak winds
Do sorely ruffle; for many miles about
There's scarce a bush.

REGAN.

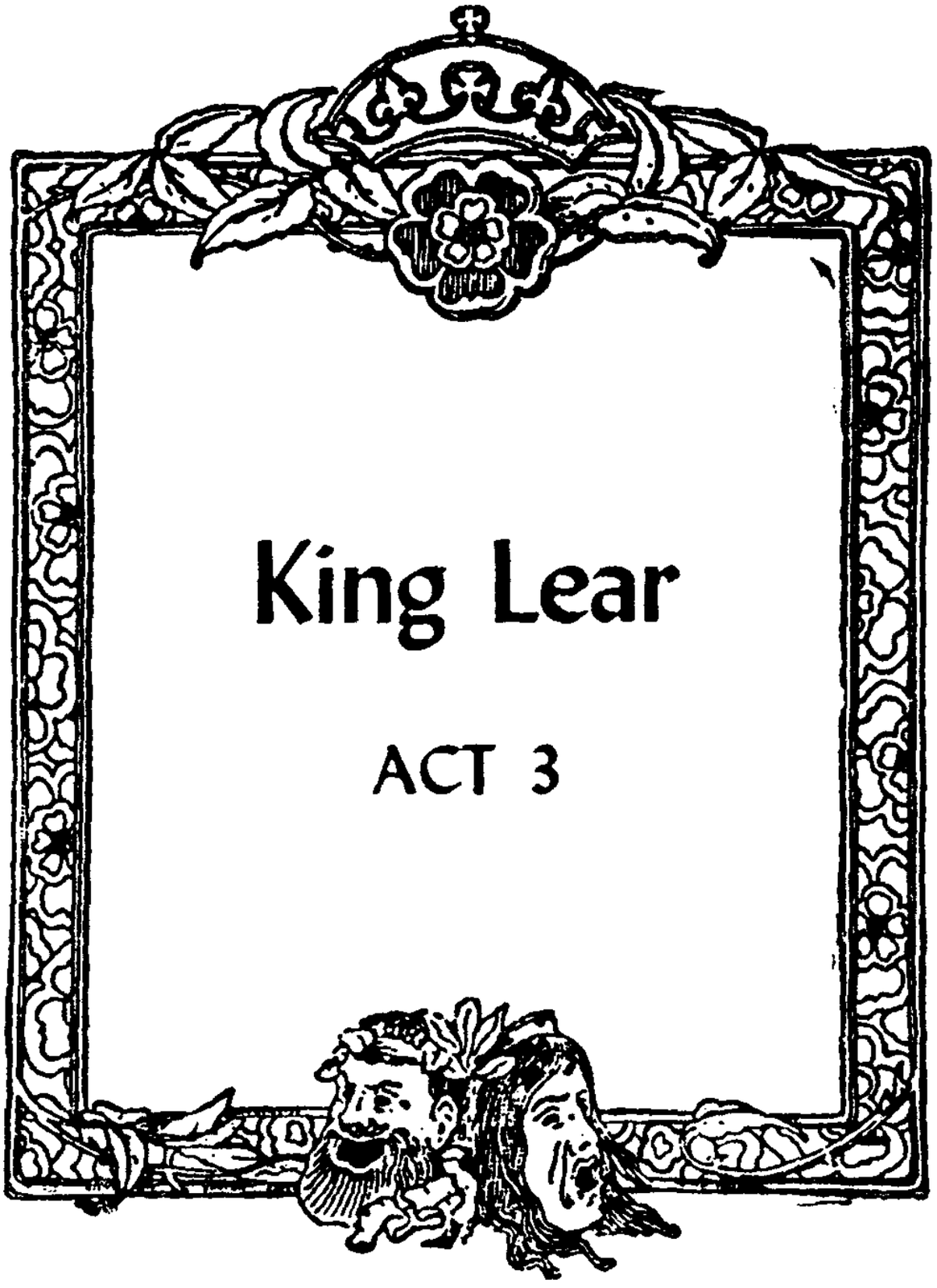
O, sir, to wilful men
The injuries that they themselves procure
Must be their schoolmasters. Shut up your doors:
He is attended with a desperate train;
And what they may incense him to, being apt
To have his ear abused,[4] wisdom bids fear.

DUKE OF CORNWALL.

Shut up your doors, my lord; 'tis a wild night:
My Regan counsels well: come out o'the storm. [*Exeunt.*

---

[1] **For this particular:** as far as he himself is concerned.
[2] **best to give him way:** best to let him have his own way.
[3] **he leads himself:** insists on doing as he pleases.
[4] **being apt/To have his ear abused:** being in the mood to listen to violent talk.



King Lear

ACT 3

ACT III

KING LEAR, accompanied only by his Fool and Kent, rages at the storm. Kent wants him to take shelter in a hovel, but they find there Edgar disguised as a lunatic beggar, calling himself Poor Tom. Lear, already deeply disturbed by fury, resentment against his daughters' ingratitude, and exposure to the storm, begins to lose his wits at the sight of Poor Tom. Gloucester finds Lear and leads him to shelter in a farmhouse, where Lear in his madness arraigns Goneril and Regan in a mock trial. Edmund betrays his father's rescue of Lear to Regan and Cornwall, who condemn Gloucester as a traitor, bind him and tear out his eyes. Cornwall is fatally wounded by a servant who is revolted by the treatment of Gloucester. Gloucester, who has now learned about Edmund's deceptions, is thrust out of doors.

ACT III. Scene I.

A heath.

Storm still. Enter KENT *and a* GENTLEMAN, *severally.*

EARL OF KENT.

Who's there, besides foul weather?

GENTLEMAN.

One minded like the weather, most unquietly.

EARL OF KENT.

I know you. Where's the king?

GENTLEMAN.

Contending with the fretful elements;
Bids the wind blow the earth into the sea,
Or swell the curled waters 'bove the main,[1]
That things might change or cease; tears his white hair,
Which the impetuous blasts, with eyeless[2] rage,
Catch in their fury, and make nothing of;[3]
Strives in his little world of man to out-scorn
The to-and-fro-conflicting wind and rain.
This night, wherein the cub-drawn bear[4] would couch,
The lion and the belly-pinched wolf
Keep their fur dry, unbonneted [5] he runs,
And bids what will take all.

EARL OF KENT.

But who is with him?

GENTLEMAN.

None but the fool; who labours to out-jest
His heart-struck injuries.

---

[1] **main:** land.
[2] **eyeless:** sightless; blind.
[3] **make nothing of:** treat with disrespect.
[4] **cub-drawn bear:** a bear that has suckled her cubs, and is therefore dangerous.
[5] **unbonneted:** without a hat; bareheaded.

EARL OF KENT.

Sir, I do know you;
And dare, upon the warrant of my note,[1]
Commend [2] a dear[3] thing to you. There is division,
Although as yet the face of it be cover'd
With mutual cunning,[4] 'twixt Albany and Cornwall;
Who have—as who have not, that their great stars
Throned and set high?—servants, who seem no less,[5]
Which are to France the spies and speculations[6]
Intelligent[7] of our state; what hath been seen,
Either in snuffs and packings[8] of the dukes;
Or the hard rein which both of them have borne
Against the old kind king; or something deeper,
Whereof perchance these are but furnishings;[9]—
But, true it is, from France there comes a power
Into this scatter'd kingdom; who already,
Wise in our negligence, have secret feet[10]
In some of our best ports, and are at point[11]
To show their open banner.—Now to you:
If on my credit you dare build so far
To make your speed to Dover, you shall find
Some that will thank you, making just report
Of how unnatural and bemadding sorrow
The king hath cause to plain.[12]
I am a gentleman of blood and breeding;
And, from some knowledge and assurance, offer
This office to you.

GENTLEMAN.

I will talk further with you.

EARL OF KENT.

No, do not.

---

[1] **And dare . . . note:** and, gambling upon my knowledge of you. [2] **Commend:** entrust. [3] **dear:** important. [4] **cunning:** skill. [5] **servants, . . . less:** who do not seem less than servants (spies). [6] **speculations:** spies. [7] **Intelligent:** giving information. [8] **snuffs and packings:** quarrels and plots. [9] **furnishings:** pretexts; excuses. [10] **have secret feet:** have gained a secret foothold. [11] **at point:** ready. [12] **plain:** complain.

For confirmation that I am much more
Than my out-wall,[1] open this purse, and take
What it contains. If you shall see Cordelia,—
As fear not but you shall,—show her this ring;
And she will tell you who your fellow[2] is
That yet you do not know. Fie on this storm!
I will go seek the king.

GENTLEMAN.

Give me your hand: have you no more to say?

EARL OF KENT.

Few words, but, to effect,[3] more than all yet,—
That, when we have found the king,—in which your pain
That way, I'll this,[4]—he that first lights on him
Holla[5] the other. [*Exeunt severally.*

SCENE II.

Another part of the heath.

Storm still. Enter LEAR *and* FOOL.

KING LEAR.

Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks! rage! blow!
You cataracts and hurricanoes,[6] spout
Till you have drencht our steeples, drown'd the cocks![7]
You sulphurous and thought-executing[8] fires,
Vaunt-couriers[9] to oak-cleaving thunderbolts,
Singe my white head! And thou, all-shaking thunder,
Strike flat the thick rotundity o'the world!
Crack nature's moulds, all germens[10] spill at once,
That make ingrateful man!

---

[1] **out-wall:** exterior; outer appearance. [2] **fellow:** companion. [3] **to effect:** in importance. [4] **in . . . this:** you search that way; I'll go this way. [5] **Holla:** a cry for attention. [6] **hurricanoes:** waterspouts. [7] **cocks:** weathercocks to determine the direction of the wind. [8] **thought-executing:** acting with the swiftness of thought. [9] **Vaunt-couriers:** forerunners. [10] **germens:** human seeds.

FOOL.

O nuncle, court holy-water[1] in a dry house is better than this rain-water out o'door. Good nuncle, in, and ask thy daughters' blessing: here's a night pities neither wise man nor fool.

KING LEAR.

Rumble thy bellyful! Spit, fire! spout, rain!
Nor rain, wind, thunder, fire, are my daughters:
I tax not you, you elements, with unkindness;
I never gave you kingdom, call'd you children,
You owe me no subscription:[2] then let fall
Your horrible pleasure; here I stand, your slave,
A poor, infirm, weak, and despised old man:—
But yet I call you servile ministers,[3]
That have with two pernicious daughters join'd
Your high-engender'd[4] battles[5] 'gainst a head
So old and white as this! O! O! 'tis foul!

FOOL.

He that has a house to put's head in has a good head-piece.[6]

The cod-piece[7] that will house
Before the head has any,
The head and he shall louse;—
So beggars marry many.
The man that makes his toe
What he his heart should make
Shall of a corn cry woe,
And turn his sleep to wake:

for there was never yet fair woman but she made mouths in a glass.[8]

KING LEAR.

No, I will be the pattern of all patience;
I will say nothing.

---

[1] **court holy-water:** flattery of high ones. [2] **subscription:** obedience. [3] **ministers:** agents. [4] **high-engender'd:** that is, engendered in the heavens. [5] **battles:** battalions. [6] **head-piece:** brain. [7] **cod-piece:** the phallus. [8] **made mouths in a glass:** made pretty faces at themselves in a mirror.

Enter KENT.

EARL OF KENT.

Who's there?

FOOL.

Marry, here's grace[1] and a cod-piece; that's a wise man and a fool.

EARL OF KENT.

Alas, sir, are you here? things that love night
Love not such nights as these; the wrathful skies
Gallow[2] the very wanderers of the dark,
And make them keep their caves: since I was man,
Such sheets of fire, such bursts of horrid thunder,
Such groans of roaring wind and rain, I never
Remember to have heard: man's nature cannot carry[3]
The affliction nor the fear.

KING LEAR.

Let the great gods,
That keep this dreadful pother[4] o'er our heads,
Find out their enemies now. Tremble, thou wretch,
That hast within thee undivulged crimes,
Unwhipt of justice: hide thee, thou bloody hand;
Thou perjured, and thou simular[5] of virtue
That art incestuous: caitiff,[6] to pieces shake,
That under covert and convenient seeming[7]
Hast practised on man's life:[8] close pent-up guilts,
Rive[9] your concealing continents, and cry
These dreadful summoners grace.[10]—I am a man
More sinn'd against than sinning.

EARL OF KENT.

Alack, bare-headed!
Gracious my lord, hard by[11] here is a hovel;
Some friendship will it lend you 'gainst the tempest:

---

[1] **grace:** majesty. [2] **Gallow:** terrify. [3] **carry:** endure. [4] **pother:** hubbub. [5] **simular:** simulator. [6] **caitiff:** wretch. [7] **covert and convenient seeming:** hypocrisy. [8] **Hast practised on man's life:** has plotted against a man's life. [9] **Rive:** split open. [10] **cry/These dreadful summoners grace:** beg mercy of these opposing forces of vengeance. [11] **hard by:** close by.

Repose you there; while I to this hard [1] house—
More harder than the stones whereof 'tis raised;
Which[2] even but now, demanding after you,
Denied me to come in—return, and force
Their scanted [3] *courtesy.*

KING LEAR.

My wits begin to turn.—
Come on, *my boy: how dost, my boy? art cold?*
I am cold myself.—Where is this straw, my fellow?
The art[4] of our necessities is strange,
That can make vile things precious. Come, your hovel.—
Poor fool and knave, I have one part in my heart
That's sorry yet for thee.

FOOL [*singing*].

He that has and a little tiny wit,—
With hey, ho, the wind and the rain,—
Must make content with his fortunes fit,
Though the rain it raineth every day.

KING LEAR.

True, my good boy.—Come, bring us to this hovel.

[*Exeunt* LEAR *and* KENT.

FOOL.

This is a brave[5] night to cool a courtezan.—I'll speak a prophecy ere I go:

When priests are more in word than matter;
When brewers mar their malt with water;
When nobles are their tailors' tutors;[6]
No heretics burn'd, but wenches' suitors;
When every case in law is right;
No squire in debt, nor no poor knight;

---

[1] **hard:** cruel.
[2] **which:** the occupants of which.
[3] **scanted:** meager.
[4] **art:** alchemy.
[5] **brave:** fine.
[6] **are their tailors' tutors:** teach their tailors their trade.

When slanders do not live in tongues;
Nor cutpurses[1] come not to throngs;
When usurers tell [2] their gold i'the field;
And bawds and whores do churches build;—
Then shall the realm of Albion[3]
Come to great confusion:
Then comes the time, who lives to see't,
That going shall be used with feet.[4]
This prophecy Merlin[5] shall make; for I live before his time.
[*Exit.*

Scene III.

GLOSTER'S *castle.*

Enter GLOSTER *and* EDMUND.

EARL OF GLOSTER.

Alack, alack, Edmund, I like not this unnatural dealing. When I desired their leave that I might pity him, they took from me the use of mine own house; charged me, on pain of their perpetual displeasure, neither to speak of him, entreat for him, nor any way sustain him.

EDMUND.

Most savage and unnaturall

EARL OF GLOSTER.

Go to; say you nothing. There is division betwixt the dukes; and a worse matter than that: I have received a letter this night;—'tis dangerous to be spoken;—I have lockt the letter in my closet: these injuries the king now bears will be revenged home;[6] there is part of a power already footed:[7] we must incline to the king. I will seek him, and privily[8] relieve him: go you, and maintain talk with the duke, that my charity

---

[1] **cutpurses:** pickpockets. [2] **tell:** count. [3] **Albion:** the most ancient name for the British Isles, probably Celtic in origin. [4] **going . . . feet:** feet shall be used for walking. [5] **Merlin:** a magician at the court of King Arthur. [6] **home:** to the full. [7] **footed:** landed. [8] **privily:** secretly.

be not of him perceived: if he ask for me, I am ill, and gone to bed. Though I die for it, as no less is threaten'd me, the king my old master must be relieved. There is some strange thing toward,[1] Edmund; pray you, be careful. [*Exit.*

EDMUND.

This courtesy, forbid thee, shall the duke
Instantly know; and of that letter too:—
This seems a fair deserving,[2] and must draw me
That which my father loses,—no less than all:
The younger rises when the old doth fall. [*Exit.*

Scene IV.

The heath, before a hovel.

Enter LEAR, KENT, *and* FOOL.

EARL OF KENT.

Here is the place, my lord; good my lord, enter:
The tyranny of the open night's[3] too rough
For nature to endure. [*Storm still.*

KING LEAR.

Let me alone.

EARL OF KENT.

Good my lord, enter here.

KING LEAR.

Wilt break my heart?

EARL OF KENT.

I had rather break mine own. Good my lord, enter.

---

[1] **toward:** afoot.

[2] **This seems a fair deserving:** this seems to be something which will deserve a reward.

[3] **open night:** night in the open.

KING LEAR.

Thou think'st 'tis much that this contentious storm
Invades us to the skin: so 'tis to thee;
But where the greater malady is fixt,
The lesser is scarce felt. Thou'ldst shun a bear;
But if thy flight lay toward the roaring sea,
Thou'ldst meet the bear i'the mouth. When the mind's free,
The body's delicate:[1] the tempest in my mind
Doth from my senses take all feeling else
Save what beats there.—Filial ingratitude!
Is it not as this mouth should tear this hand
For lifting food to't?—But I will punish home:[2]—
No, I will weep no more.—In such a night
To shut me out!—Pour on; I will endure:—
In such a night as this! O Regan, Goneril!—
Your old kind father, whose frank[3] heart gave all,—
O, that way madness lies; let me shun that;
No more of that.

EARL OF KENT.

Good my lord, enter here.

KING LEAR.

Prithee, go in thyself; seek thine own ease:
This tempest will not give me leave to ponder
On things would hurt me more.—But I'll go in.
[*to the* FOOL] In, boy; go first. You houseless poverty,—
Nay, get thee in. I'll pray, and then I'll sleep.—

[FOOL *goes in.*

Poor naked wretches, wheresoe'er you are,
That bide[4] the pelting of this pitiless storm,

---

[1] **delicate:** sensitive; fastidious.
[2] **home:** to the full.
[3] **frank:** generous.
[4] **bide:** endure.

How shall your houseless heads and unfed sides,
Your loopt and window'd [1] raggedness, defend you
From seasons such as these? O, I have ta'en
Too little care of this! Take physic, pomp;
Expose thyself to feel what wretches feel,
That thou mayst shake the superflux[2] to them,
And show the heavens more just.

EDGAR [*within*].

Fathom and half,[3] fathom and half!
Poor Tom! [*The* FOOL *runs out from the hovel.*

FOOL.

Come not in here, nuncle, here's a spirit. Help me, help me!

EARL OF KENT.

Give me thy hand.—Who's there?

FOOL.

A spirit, a spirit: he says his name's poor Tom.

EARL OF KENT.

What art thou that dost grumble there i'the straw? Come forth.

Enter EDGAR *disguised as a madman.*

EDGAR.

Away! the foul fiend follows me!—
Through the sharp hawthorn blows the cold wind.—
Hum! go to thy cold bed, and warm thee.

KING LEAR.

Hast thou given all to thy two daughters?
And art thou come to this?

EDGAR.

Who gives any thing to poor Tom? whom the foul fiend hath led through fire and through flame, through ford and whirl-

---

[1] **loopt and window'd:** that is, full of gaping holes and openings.
[2] **shake the superflux:** scatter the superfluity (overabundance).
[3] **Fathom and half:** an allusion to the heavy rain.

pool, o'er bog and quagmire; that hath laid knives under his pillow, and halters in his pew; set ratsbane by his porridge;[1] made him proud of heart, to ride on a bay trotting-horse over four-incht bridges, to course[2] his own shadow for a traitor.—Bless thy five wits! [3]—Tom's a-cold,—O, do de, do de, do de.[4] —Bless thee from whirlwinds, star-blasting, and taking! [5] Do poor Tom some charity, whom the foul fiend vexes:—there could I have him now,—and there—and there again, and there. [*Storm still.*

KING LEAR.

What, have his daughters brought him to this pass?—
Couldst thou save nothing? Didst thou give 'em all?

FOOL.

Nay, he reserved a blanket, else we had been all shamed.

KING LEAR.

Now, all the plagues that in the pendulous air
Hang fated o'er men's faults light on thy daughters!

EARL OF KENT.

He hath no daughters, sir.

KING LEAR.

Death, traitor! nothing could have subdued nature
To such a lowness but his unkind daughters.—
Is it the fashion, that discarded fathers
Should have thus little mercy on their flesh?
Judicious punishment! 'twas this flesh begot
Those pelican[6] daughters.

---

[1] **laid knives . . . etc.:** it was a common belief that demons tempted men to commit suicide; Edgar's ravings are adapted from Harsnett's *Declaration of Egregious Popish Impostures.* [2] **course:** chase. [3] **five wits:** five senses. [4] **O, do de, do de, do de:** he is shivering from the cold. [5] **taking:** evil influences. [6] **pelican:** pelicans were supposed to pierce their own breasts to provide food for their young.

EDGAR.

Pillicock[1] sat on Pillicock-hill:—

Halloo, halloo, loo, loo!

FOOL.

This cold night will turn us all to fools and madmen.

EDGAR.

Take heed o the foul fiend: obey thy parents; keep thy word justly; swear not; commit not with man's sworn spouse; set not thy sweet heart on proud array. Tom's a-cold.

KING LEAR.

What hast thou been?

EDGAR.

A servingman, proud in heart and mind; that curl'd my hair; wore gloves in my cap; served the lust of my mistress' heart, and did the act of darkness with her; swore as many oaths as I spake words, and broke them in the sweet face of heaven: one that slept in the contriving of lust, and waked to do it: wine loved I deeply, dice dearly; and in woman out-paramour'd the Turk: false of heart, light of ear, bloody of hand; hog in sloth, fox in stealth, wolf in greediness, dog in madness, lion in prey. Let not the creaking of shoes nor the rustling of silks betray thy poor heart to woman: keep thy foot out of brothels, thy hand out of plackets,[2] thy pen from lenders' books, and defy the foul fiend.—

Still through the hawthorn blows the cold wind;
Says suum, mun, ha, no, nonny.
Dolphin[3] my boy, my boy, sessa! let him trot by.

[*Storm still.*

---

[1] **Pillicock:** a term of endearment; also a synonym for *phallus*

[2] **plackets:** openings in petticoats and skirts for convenience in putting on; also, a loose woman.

[3] **Dolphin:** Dauphin (identified with the devil because of the Englishman's dislike of the French).

KING LEAR.

Why, thou wert better in thy grave than to answer[1] with thy uncover'd body this extremity of the skies.—Is man no more than this? Consider him well. Thou owest the worm no silk, the beast no hide, the sheep no wool, the cat[2] no perfume.—Ha! here's three on's are sophisticated! [3]—Thou art the thing itself: unaccommodated [4] man is no more but such a poor, bare, forkt[5] animal as thou art.—Off, off, you lendings! [6]—come, unbutton here. [*Tearing off his clothes.*

FOOL.

Prithee, nuncle, be contented; 'tis a naughty[7] night to swim in.—Now a little fire in a wild field were like an old lecher's heart,—a small spark, all the rest on's body cold.—Look, here comes a walking fire.

Enter GLOSTER, *with a torch.*

EDGAR.

This is the foul fiend Flibbertigibbet:[8] he begins at curfew, and walks till the first cock;[9] he gives the web and the pin,[10] squints the eye, and makes the hare-lip; mildews the white wheat, and hurts the poor creature of earth.

Swithold footed thrice the old;
He met the night-mare, and her nine-fold;
Bid her alight,
And her troth plight,
And, aroint thee, witch, aroint thee! [11]

EARL OF KENT.

How fares your Grace?

KING LEAR.

What's he?

---

[1] **answer:** encounter. [2] **cat:** civet cat. [3] **here's three on's are sophisticated:** three of us are artificial (clothed). [4] **unaccommodated:** naked. [5] **forkt:** two-legged. [6] **lendings:** borrowed raiment. [7] **naughty:** wicked. [8] **Flibbertigibbet:** one of Harsnett's demons. [9] **first cock:** midnight. [10] **web and the pin:** cataract. [11] **Swithold . . . thee:** a charm to ward off nightmares.

EARL OF KENT.

Who's there? What is't you seek?

EARL OF GLOSTER.

What are you there?
Your names?

EDGAR.

Poor Tom; that eats the swimming frog, the toad, the tadpole, the wall-newt[1] and the water;[2] that in the fury of his heart, when the foul fiend rages, eats cow-dung for sallets;[3] swallows the old rat and the ditch-dog; drinks the green mantle of the standing pool; who is whipt from tithing[4] to tithing, and stock-punisht, and imprison'd; who hath had three suits to his back, six shirts to his body,

Horse to ride, and weapon to wear;
But mice, and rats, and such small deer,
Have been Tom's food for seven long year.

Beware my follower.[5]—Peace, Smulkin;[6] peace, thou fiend!

EARL OF GLOSTER.

What, hath your Grace no better company?

EDGAR.

The prince of darkness is a gentleman: Modo he's call'd, and Mahu.[7]

EARL OF GLOSTER.

Our flesh and blood, my lord, is grown so vile,
That it doth hate what gets[8] it.

EDGAR.

Poor Tom's a-cold.

EARL OF GLOSTER.

Go in with me: my duty cannot suffer[9]
T'obey in all your daughters' hard [10] commands:

---

[1] **wall-newt:** wall lizard. [2] **water:** water lizard. [3] **sallets:** salads: in this instance, something good to eat. [4] **tithing:** a small parish consisting of ten families. [5] **follower:** familiar. [6] **Smulkin:** one of Samuel Harsnett's devils. [7] **Modo . . . Mahu:** other devils in Harsnett's *Declaration*. [8] **gets:** begets. [9] **cannot suffer:** will not permit me. [10] **hard:** cruel.

Though their injunction be to bar my doors,
And let this tyrannous night take hold upon you,
Yet have I ventured to come seek you out,
And bring you where both fire and food is ready.

KING LEAR.

First let me talk with this philosopher.—
What is the cause of thunder?

EARL OF KENT.

Good my lord, take his offer; go into the house.

KING LEAR.

I'll talk a word with this same learned Theban.[1]—
What is your study?

EDGAR.

How to prevent the fiend, and to kill vermin.

KING LEAR.

Let me ask you one word in private.

EARL OF KENT.

Importune him once more to go, my lord;
His wits begin t'unsettle.

EARL OF GLOSTER.

Canst thou blame him?
His daughters seek his death:—ah, that good Kent!—
He said it would be thus,—poor banisht man!—
Thou say'st the king grows mad; I'll tell thee, friend,
I am almost mad myself: I had a son,
Now outlaw'd from my blood;[2] he sought my life,
But lately, very late: I loved him, friend,
No father his son dearer: true to tell thee, [*Storm still.*

---

[1] **learned Theban:** philosopher (used ironically).
[2] **outlaw'd from my blood:** disowned.

The grief hath crazed my wits.—What a night's this!—
I do beseech your Grace,—

KING LEAR.

O, cry you mercy,[1] sir.—
Noble philosopher, your company.

EDGAR.

Tom's a-cold.

EARL OF GLOSTER.

In, fellow, there, into the hovel: keep thee warm.

KING LEAR.

Come, let's in all.

EARL OF KENT.

This way, my lord.

KING LEAR.

With him;
I will keep still [2] with my philosopher.

EARL OF KENT.

Good my lord, soothe him! [3] let him take the fellow.

EARL OF GLOSTER.

Take him you on.

EARL OF KENT.

Sirrah, come on; go along with us.

KING LEAR.

Come, good Athenian.

EARL OF GLOSTER.

No words, no words: hush.

EDGAR.

Child [4] Rowland to the dark tower came;
His word was still,[5]—Fie, foh, and fum,
I smell the blood of a British man. [*Exeunt.*

---

[1] **cry you mercy:** I beg your pardon.
[2] **keep still:** still stay; remain.
[3] **soothe him:** humor him.
[4] **Child:** a candidate for knighthood.
[5] **His word was still:** "Always" was his motto.

SCENE V.

GLOSTER'S *castle.*

Enter CORNWALL *and* EDMUND.

DUKE OF CORNWALL.

I will have my revenge ere I depart his house.

EDMUND.

How, my lord, I may be censured,[1] that nature thus gives way to loyalty, something fears me[2] to think of.

DUKE OF CORNWALL.

I now perceive, it was not altogether your brother's evil disposition made him seek his death; but a provoking merit,[3] set a-work by a reproveable badness in himself.

EDMUND.

How malicious is my fortune, that I must repent to be just! This is the letter he spoke of, which approves[4] him an intelligent party[5] to the advantages of France. O heavens! that this treason were not, or not I the detector!

DUKE OF CORNWALL.

Go with me to the duchess.

EDMUND.

If the matter of this paper be certain, you have mighty business in hand.

DUKE OF CORNWALL.

True or false, it hath made thee Earl of Gloster. Seek out where thy father is, that he may be ready for our apprehension.[6]

EDMUND [*aside*].

If I find him comforting[7] the king, it will stuff his suspicion[8] more fully.—I will persever[9] in my course of loyalty, though the conflict be sore between that and my blood.

---

[1] **How . . . I may be censured:** what will be thought of me. [2] **something fears me:** somewhat frightens me. [3] **a provoking merit . . . himself:** a consciousness of his own worth which spurred him on. [4] **approves:** proves. [5] **an intelligent party:** a spy. [6] **apprehension:** arrest. [7] **comforting:** supporting. [8] **stuff his suspicion:** add to his suspicion. [9] **persever:** continue.

DUKE OF CORNWALL.

I will lay trust upon thee; and thou shalt find a dearer father in my love. [*Exeunt.*

Scene VI.

A farmhouse adjoining the castle.

Enter LEAR, KENT, GLOSTER, FOOL, *and* EDGAR.

EARL OF GLOSTER.

Here is better than the open air; take it thankfully. I will piece[1] out the comfort with what addition I can: I will not be long from you.

EARL OF KENT.

All the power of his wits have given way to his impatience: —the gods reward your kindness! [*Exit* GLOSTER.

EDGAR.

Frateretto[2] calls me, and tells me Nero is an angler in the lake of darkness.—Pray, innocent, and beware the foul fiend.

FOOL.

Prithee, nuncle, tell me whether a madman be a gentleman or a yeoman?

KING LEAR.

A king, a king!

FOOL.

No, he's a yeoman that has a gentleman to his son; for he's a mad yeoman that sees his son a gentleman before him.

---

[1] **piece:** eke.

[2] **Frateretto:** another of Harsnett's fiends.

KING LEAR.

To have a thousand with red burning spits
Come hissing in upon 'em,[1]—

EDGAR.

The foul fiend bites my back.

FOOL.

He's mad that trusts in the tameness of a wolf, a horse's health, a boy's love, or a whore's oath.

KING LEAR.

It shall be done; I will arraign them straight.[2]—
[*to* EDGAR] Come, sit thou here, most learned justicer;—
[*to the* FOOL] Thou, sapient sir, sit here.—Now, you she foxes!—

EDGAR.

Look, where he stands and glares![3]—Want'st thou eyes at trial, madam?
Come o'er the bourn,[4] Bessy to me.

FOOL.

Her boat hath a leak,
And she must not speak
Why she dares not come over to thee.

EDGAR.

The foul fiend haunts poor Tom in the voice of a nightingale. Hopdance,[5] cries[6] in Tom's belly for two white herring. Croak not, black angel; I have no food for thee.

EARL OF KENT.

How do you, sir? Stand you not so amazed:[7]
Will you lie down and rest upon the cushions?

KING LEAR.

I'll see their trial first.—Bring in the evidence.—
[*to* EDGAR] Thou robed man of justice, take thy place;—
[*to the* FOOL] And thou, his yoke-fellow of equity,

---

[1] **upon 'em:** upon Goneril and Regan. [2] **straight:** immediately. [3] **Look, where he stands and glares:** an imaginary fiend. [4] **bourn:** burn; brook. [5] **Hopdance:** Harsnett's spelling of this fiend is *Hoberdidance*. [6] **cries:** his stomach is rumbling from hunger. [7] **amazed:** dumbfounded.

Bench by his side:—[*to* KENT] You are o'the commission,[1]
Sit you too.

EDGAR.

Let us deal justly.

Sleepest or wakest thou, jolly shepherd?
Thy *sheep be in the corn;*
And for one blast of thy minikin[2] mouth
Thy sheep shall take no harm.

Purl[3] the cat is gray.[4]

KING LEAR.

Arraign her first; 'tis Goneril. I here take my oath before this honourable assembly, she kickt the poor king her father.

FOOL.

Come hither, *mistress.* Is your name Goneril?

KING LEAR.

She cannot deny it.

FOOL.

Cry you mercy, I took you for a joint-stool.[5]

KING LEAR.

And here's another, whose warpt[6] looks proclaim
What store[7] her heart is made on.—Stop her there!
Arms, arms, sword, fire!—Corruption in the place!—
False justicer, why hast thou let her scape?

EDGAR.

Bless thy five wits!

EARL OF KENT.

O pity!—Sir, *where is the patience now*
That you so oft have boasted to retain?

---

[1] **o'the commission:** that is, commissioned as a justice. [2] **minikin:** small; pretty (*mignonne*). [3] **Pur:** Purr is the name of one of Harsnett's demons. [4] **the cat is gray:** an allusion to a demon or familiar appearing in the form of a gray cat. [5] **Cry . . . joint-stool:** from an old proverb; used as an insult, although in this case the fool is speaking to a stool. [6] **warpt:** perverse. [7] **store:** material.

EDGAR [*aside*].

My tears begin to take his part so much,
They'll mar my counterfeiting.[1]

KING LEAR.

The little dogs and all,
Tray, Blanch, and Sweetheart, see, they bark at me.

EDGAR.

Tom will throw his head at them.—Avaunt, you curs!
Be thy mouth or black or white,
Tooth that poisons if it bite;
Mastiff, greyhound, mongrel grim,
Hound of spaniel, brach[2] or lym,[3]
Or bobtail tike[4] or trundle-tail,[5]—
Tom will make them weep and wail:
For, with throwing thus my head,
Dogs leap the hatch,[6] and all are fled.
Do de, de, de. Sessa! Come, march to wakes and fairs and market-towns.—Poor Tom, thy horn is dry.[7]

KING LEAR.

Then let them anatomize[8] Regan; see what breeds about her heart. Is there any cause in nature that makes these hard hearts?—[*to* EDGAR] You, sir, I entertain[9] for one of my hundred; only I do not like the fashion of your garments: you will say they are Persian attire;[10] but let them be changed.

EARL OF KENT.

Now, my good lord, lie here and rest awhile.

KING LEAR.

Make no noise, make no noise; draw the curtains: so, so, so: we'll go to supper i'the morning: so, so, so.

---

[1] **counterfeiting**: disguise. [2] **brach**: a hound bitch. [3] **lym**: a bloodhound which gets its name from the liam (leather thong) used as a lead. [4] **bobtail tike**: a short-tailed mongrel. [5] **trundle-tail**: a dog with a long, drooping tail. [6] **hatch**: the lower half of a divided door. [7] **thy horn is dry**: that is, Edgar has run out of foolish things to say. [8] **anatomize**: dissect. [9] **I entertain**: I hire you. [10] **Persian attire**: very costly clothing (sarcastic).

FOOL.

And I'll go to bed at noon.

Enter GLOSTER.

EARL OF GLOSTER.

Come hither, friend; where is the king my master?

EARL OF KENT.

Here, sir; but trouble him not,—his wits are gone.[1]

EARL OF GLOSTER.

Good friend, I prithee, take him in thy arms;
I have o'erheard a plot of death upon[2] him:
There is a litter ready; lay him in't,
And drive towards Dover, friend, where thou shalt meet
Both welcome and protection. Take up thy master:
If thou shouldst dally half an hour, his life,
With thine, and all that offer to defend him,
Stand in assured loss:[3] take up, take up;
And follow me, that will to some provision
Give thee quick conduct.

EARL OF KENT.

Oppressed nature sleeps:—
This rest might yet have balm'd thy broken sinews,[4]
Which, if convenience will not allow,
Stand in hard cure.[5]—[*to the* FOOL] Come, help to bear thy master;
Thou must not stay behind.

EARL OF GLOSTER.

Come, come, away.

[*Exeunt* KENT, GLOSTER, *and the* FOOL, *bearing off* LEAR.

---

[1] his wits are gone: he is asleep.
[2] upon: against.
[3] Stand in assured loss: will certainly be lost.
[4] broken sinews: frayed nerves.
[5] Stand in hard cure: will be hard to cure or heal.

EDGAR.

When we our betters see bearing our woes,
We scarcely think our miseries our foes.
Who alone suffers suffers most i'the mind,[1]
Leaving free[2] things and happy shows behind:
But then the mind much sufferance doth o'erskip,
When grief hath mates, and bearing[3] fellowship.
How light and portable[4] my pain seems now,
When that which makes me bend makes the king bow,
He childed as I father'd!—Tom, away!
Mark the high noises;[5] and thy self bewray,[6]
When false opinion, whose wrong thoughts defile thee,
In thy just proof,[7] repeals and reconciles thee.[8]
What will hap more to-night, safe scape the king!
Lurk, lurk. [*Exit.*

SCENE VII.

A room in GLOSTER'S *castle.*

Enter CORNWALL, REGAN, GONERIL, EDMUND, *and* SERVANTS.

DUKE OF CORNWALL.

Post speedily to my lord your husband; show him this letter:
—the army of France is landed.—Seek out the traitor Gloster.
[*Exeunt some of the* SERVANTS.

REGAN.

Hang him instantly.

GONERIL.

Pluck out his eyes.

DUKE OF CORNWALL.

Leave him to my displeasure.—Edmund, keep you our sister

---

[1] **Who . . . mind:** that is, the person who has no fellow sufferers magnifies his own troubles. [2] **free:** carefree. [3] **bearing:** suffering. [4] **portable:** bearable. [5] **Mark . . . noises:** take note of the disputes among the great. [6] **thy self bewray:** reveal yourself. [7] **in thy just proof:** that is, proof of your integrity. [8] **repeals . . . thee:** repeals the sentence against you and reconciles you with your father.

company: the revenges we are bound to take upon your traitorous father are not fit for your beholding. Advise the duke, where you are going, to a most festinate preparation:[1] we are bound to the like.[2] Our posts shall be swift and intelligent[3] betwixt us. Farewell, dear sister:—farewell, my Lord of Gloster.

Enter OSWALD.

How now! where's the king?

OSWALD.

My Lord of Gloster hath convey'd him hence:
Some five or six and thirty of his knights,
Hot questrists after him,[4] met him at gate;
Who, with some other of the lords dependants,
Are gone with him towards Dover; where they boast
To have well-armed friends.

DUKE OF CORNWALL.

Get horses for your mistress.

GONERIL.

Farewell, sweet lord, and sister.

DUKE OF CORNWALL.

Edmund, farewell.

[*Exeunt* GONERIL, EDMUND, *and* OSWALD.

Go seek the traitor Gloster,
Pinion[5] him like a thief, bring him before us.

[*Exeunt other* SERVANTS.

Though well we may not pass upon his life[6]
Without the form of justice, yet our power
Shall do a court'sy[7] to our wrath, which men
May blame, but not control.—Who's there? the traitor?

---

[1] to a most festinate preparation: to make urgent preparations for war. [2] we are bound to the like: we intend to do the same. [3] intelligent: full of information. [4] Hot questrists after him: hotly pursue him. [5] Pinion: shackle. [6] pass upon his life: sentence him to death. [7] do a court'sy: yield; bend.

Enter GLOSTER, *brought in by two or three.*

REGAN.

Ingrateful fox! 'tis he.

DUKE OF CORNWALL.

Bind fast his corky[1] arms.

EARL OF GLOSTER.

What mean your Graces?—Good my friends, consider
You are my guests: do me no foul play, friends.

DUKE OF CORNWALL.

Bind him, I say. [SERVANTS *bind him.*

REGAN.

Hard, hard.—O filthy traitor!

EARL OF GLOSTER.

Unmerciful lady as you are, I'm none.

DUKE OF CORNWALL.

To this chair bind him.—Villain, thou shalt find—
[REGAN *plucks his beard.*

EARL OF GLOSTER.

By the kind gods, 'tis most ignobly done
To pluck me by the beard.

REGAN.

So white, and such a traitor!

EARL OF GLOSTER.

Naughty[2] lady,
These hairs, which thou dost ravish from my chin,
Will quicken,[3] and accuse thee: I am your host:
With robbers' hands my hospitable favours
You should not ruffle thus.[4] What will you do?

DUKE OF CORNWALL.

Come, sir, what letters had you late[5] from France?

---

[1] **corky**: withered; dry (with age).
[2] **naughty**: wicked.
[3] **quicken**: come to life.
[4] **ruffle thus**: treat so outrageously.
[5] **late**: recently.

REGAN.

Be simple-answer'd,[1] for we know the truth.

DUKE OF CORNWALL.

And what confederacy have you with the traitors
Late footed[2] in the kingdom?

REGAN.

To whose hands have you sent the lunatic king?
Speak.

EARL OF GLOSTER.

I have a letter guessingly set down,[3]
Which came from one that's of a neutral heart,
And not from one opposed.

DUKE OF CORNWALL.

Cunning.

REGAN.

And false.

DUKE OF CORNWALL.

Where hast thou sent the king?

EARL OF GLOSTER.

To Dover.

REGAN.

Wherefore to Dover? Wast thou not charged at peril[4]—

DUKE OF CORNWALL.

Wherefore to Dover? Let him answer that.

EARL OF GLOSTER.

I am tied to the stake,[5] and I must stand the course.[6]

REGAN.

Wherefore to Dover?

EARL OF GLOSTER.

Because I would not see thy cruel nails
Pluck out his poor old eyes; nor thy fierce sister
In his anointed flesh[7] stick boarish fangs.
The sea, with such a storm as his bare head

---

[1] Be simple-answer'd: answer frankly. [2] late footed: recently landed. [3] guessingly set down: written on conjecture, not definite knowledge. [4] at peril: under penalty of death. [5] tied to the stake: like a baited bear, at the mercy of dogs. [6] course: when the dogs are set on the bear. [7] anointed flesh: that is, the flesh of the anointed king.

In hell-black night endured, would have buoy'd up[1]
And quencht the stelled fires:[2]
Yet, poor old heart, he holp[3] the heavens to rain.
If wolves had at thy gate howl'd that dern[4] time,
Thou shouldst have said, 'Good porter, turn the key.'
All cruels else subscribed:[5]—but I shall see
The winged vengeance[6] overtake such children.

DUKE OF CORNWALL.

See't shalt thou never.—Fellows, hold the chair.—
Upon these eyes of thine I'll set my foot.

EARL OF GLOSTER.

He that will think[7] to live till he be old,
Give me some help!—O cruel!—O you gods!

REGAN.

One side will mock another; the other too.

DUKE OF CORNWALL.

If you see vengeance,—

FIRST SERVANT.

Hold your hand, my lord:
I have served you ever since I was a child;
But better service have I never done you
Than now to bid you hold.

REGAN.

How now, you dog!

FIRST SERVANT.

If you did wear a beard upon your chin,
I'ld shake it on this quarrel. What do you mean?

DUKE OF CORNWALL.

My villain![8]

[Draws.

---

[1] **buoy'd up:** risen up (as a buoy in water). [2] **quencht the stelled fires:** extinguished the stars. [3] **holp:** helped. [4] **dern:** dreary; dire. [5] **All cruels else subscribed:** all other cruelties may be sanctioned. [6] **winged vengeance:** divine justice. [7] **will think:** hopes. [8] **villain:** serf.

FIRST SERVANT.

Nay, then, come on, and take the chance of anger.

[*Draws. They fight.* CORNWALL *is wounded.*

REGAN.

Give me thy sword.—A peasant stand up thus!

[*Takes a sword from another* SERVANT, *and runs at* FIRST SERVANT *behind.*

FIRST SERVANT.

O, I am slain!—My lord, you have one eye left
To see some mischief on him.—O! [*Dies.*

DUKE OF CORNWALL.

Lest it see more, prevent it.—Out, vile jelly!
Where is thy lustre now?

EARL OF GLOSTER.

All dark and comfortless.—Where's my son Edmund?
Edmund, enkindle all the sparks of nature[1]
To quit this horrid act.

REGAN.

Out, treacherous villain!
Thou call'st on him that hates thee: it was he
That made the overture[2] of thy treasons to us;
Who is too good to pity thee.

EARL OF GLOSTER.

O my follies!
Then Edgar was abused.[3]—
Kind gods, forgive me that, and prosper him!

REGAN.

Go thrust him out at gates, and let him smell
His way to Dover. [*Exit one with* GLOSTER.] How is't, my lord? how look you? [4]

DUKE OF CORNWALL.

I have received a hurt:—follow me, lady.—
Turn out that eyeless villain;—throw this slave

---

[1] **the sparks of nature:** your filial loyalty.
[2] **made the overture:** made the discovery; made the revelation.
[3] **abused:** wronged.
[4] **how look you:** how do you feel.

Upon the dunghill.—Regan, I bleed apace:[1]
Untimely[2] comes this hurt: give me your arm.

[*Exit* CORNWALL, *led by* REGAN.

SECOND SERVANT.

I'll never care what wickedness I do,
If this man come to good.

THIRD SERVANT.

If she live long,
And in the end meet the old course of death,[3]
Women will all turn monsters.

SECOND SERVANT.

Let's follow the old earl, and get the Bedlam[4]
To lead him where he would: his roguish madness
Allows itself to any thing.[5]

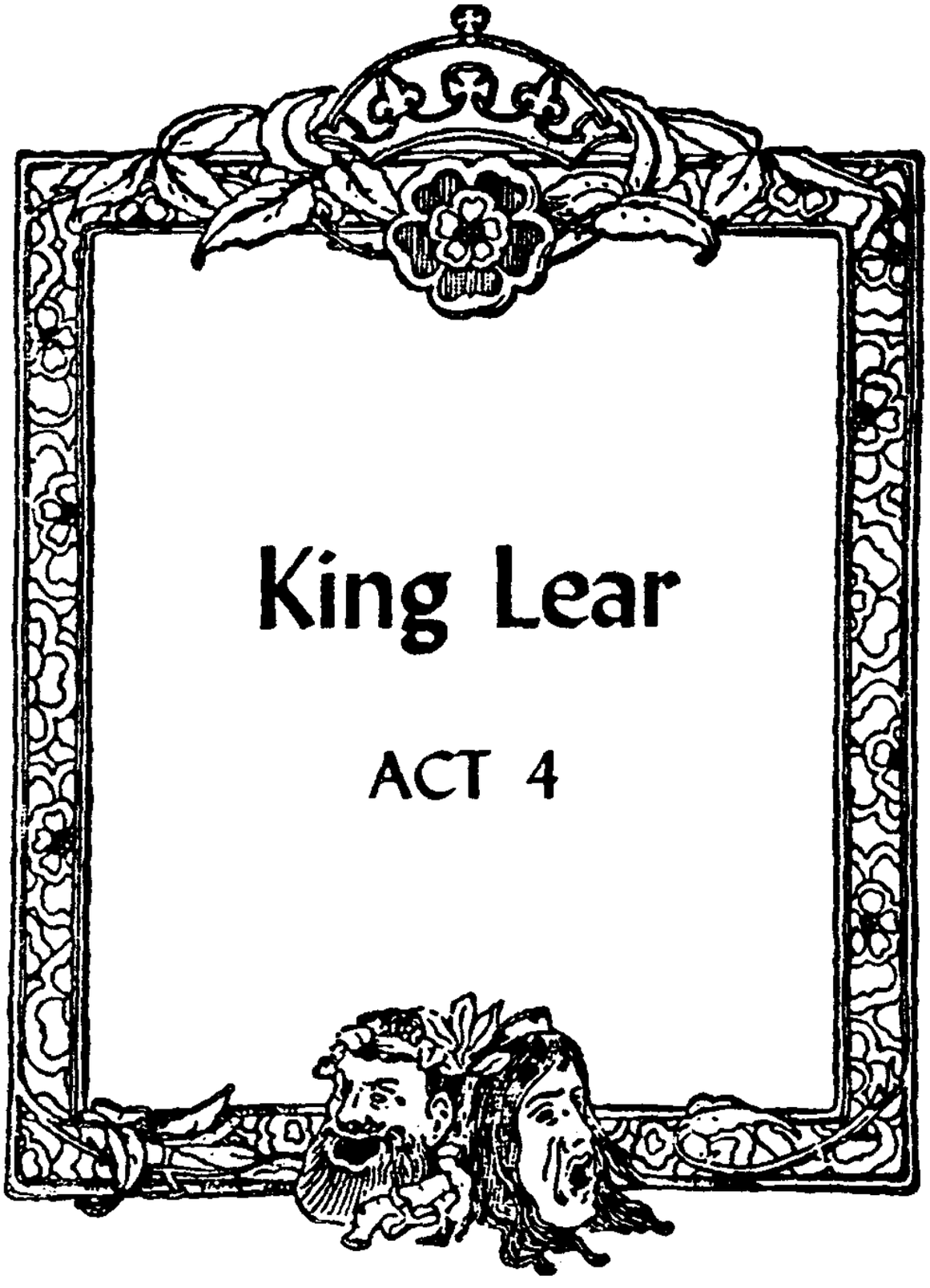
THIRD SERVANT.

Go thou: I'll fetch some flax and whites of eggs
To apply to his bleeding face. Now, heaven help him!

[*Exeunt severally.*

---

[1] apace: profusely.
[2] untimely: at an inopportune time.
[3] the old course of death: a natural death.
[4] Bedlam: Edgar (poor Tom).
[5] his roguish madness . . . any thing: as a madman, he cannot be held accountable for his actions.



King Lear

ACT 4

ACT IV

EDGAR finds his blind father, leads him to believe that he has thrown himself over a cliff and survived, and thus persuades him to go on enduring his mutilated life. The Duke of Albany blames his wife Goneril and her sister Regan for their cruelties to Lear and Gloucester, and resolves to restore them. Meanwhile, the army of the King of France, accompanied by Cordelia, has invaded Britain. Lear reaches Dover and there runs mad again in a cornfield where he meets the blind Gloucester. Cordelia recovers him and brings a doctor to tend him back to sanity. Lear and Cordelia are reconciled. Regan learns that Goneril has made advances to Edmund from Goneril's servant Oswald, who is taking a letter from Goneril to Edmund. She urges Oswald to kill Gloucester, but in the attempt Oswald is killed by Edgar, in the disguise of a countryman. Edgar takes Goneril's letter to give to Albany.

ACT IV. Scene I.

The heath.

Enter EDGAR.

EDGAR.

Yet better thus, and known to be contemn'd,
Than still contemn'd and flatter'd.[1] To be worst,
The lowest and most dejected thing of fortune,
Stands still in esperance,[2] lives not in fear:
The lamentable change is from the best;
The worst returns to laughter.[3] Welcome, then,
Thou unsubstantial air that I embrace!
The wretch that thou hast blown unto the worst
Owes nothing to thy blasts.[4]—But who comes here?

---

[1] **Yet better thus, and known to be contemn'd,/ Than still contemn'd and flatter'd:** it is better to be openly despised than to be the object of hate disguised by flattery. [2] **esperance:** expectation; hope. [3] **The worst returns to laughter:** since worst can go no lower, any change must be for the better. [4] **Owes nothing to thy blasts:** has received nothing and therefore owes nothing.

Enter GLOSTER, *led by an* OLD MAN.

My father, poorly led? [1]—World, world, O world!
But that thy strange mutations make us hate thee,
Life would not yield to age.[2]

OLD MAN.

O, my good lord,
I have been your tenant, and your father's tenant,
These fourscore years.

EARL OF GLOSTER.

Away, get thee away; good friend, be gone:
Thy comforts can do me no good at all;
Thee they may hurt.

OLD MAN.

Alack, sir, you cannot see your way.

EARL OF GLOSTER.

I have no way, and therefore want[3] no eyes;
I stumbled [4] when I saw: full oft 'tis seen,
Our means secure us,[5] and our mere defects
Prove our commodities.[6]—O dear son Edgar,
The food of thy abused [7] father's wrath!
Might I but live to see thee in my touch,
I'ld say I had eyes again!

OLD MAN.

How now! Who's there?

EDGAR [*aside*].

O gods! Who is't can say, 'I am at the worst'?
I am worse than e'er I was.

OLD MAN.

'Tis poor mad Tom.

---

[1] **poorly led:** led like a poor man or beggar. [2] **But that . . . age:** if the misfortunes and changes of life did not make us hate the world, we would not be reconciled to growing old and dying. [3] **want:** need. [4] **stumbled:** erred. [5] **Our means secure us:** our material advantages make us careless. [6] **and . . . commodities:** and our very misfortunes prove to be blessings. [7] **abused:** deceived.

EDGAR [*aside*].

And worse I may be yet: the worst is not
So long as we can say 'This is the worst.'

OLD MAN.

Fellow, where goest?

EARL OF GLOSTER.

Is it a beggar-man?

OLD MAN.

Madman and beggar too.

EARL OF GLOSTER.

He has some reason,[1] else he could not beg.
I'the last night's storm I such a fellow saw;
Which made me think a man a worm:[2] my son
Came then into my mind; and yet my mind
Was then scarce friends with him: I have heard more since.
As flies to wanton boys, are we to the gods,—
They kill us for their sport.

EDGAR [*aside*].

How should this be? [3]—
Bad is the trade that must play fool to sorrow,
Angering itself and others.—Bless thee, master!

EARL OF GLOSTER.

Is that the naked fellow?

OLD MAN.

Ay, my lord.

EARL OF GLOSTER.

Then, prithee, get thee gone: if, for my sake,
Thou wilt o'ertake us hence a mile or twain
I'the way toward Dover, do it for ancient love;
And bring some covering for this naked soul,
Which I'll entreat to lead me.

---

[1] **reason**: intelligence.

[2] **worm**: *Job xxv. 6*—"How much less man, *that is* a worm? and the son of man, *which is* a worm?"

[3] **How should this be**: how can this be (Edgar is wondering how his father has learned of Edmund's deception).

OLD MAN.

Alack, sir, he is mad.

EARL OF GLOSTER.

'Tis the times' plague, when madmen lead the blind.
Do as I bid thee, or rather do thy pleasure;
Above the rest,[1] be gone.

OLD MAN.

I'll bring him the best 'parel [2] that I have,
Come on't what will. [*Exit.*

EARL OF GLOSTER.

Sirrah, naked fellow,—

EDGAR.

Poor Tom's a-cold.—[*aside*] I cannot daub[3] it further.

EARL OF GLOSTER.

Come hither, fellow.

EDGAR [*aside*].

And yet I must. Bless thy sweet eyes, they bleed.

EARL OF GLOSTER.

Know'st thou the way to Dover?

EDGAR.

Both stile and gate, horse-way and foot-path. Poor Tom hath been scared out of his good wits:—bless thee, good man's son, from the foul fiend!—five fiends have been in poor Tom at once; of lust, as Obidicut,[4] Hobbididence, prince of dumbness; Mahu, of stealing; Modo, of murder; and Flibbertigibbet, of mopping and mowing,[5]—who since possesses chambermaids and waiting-women. So, bless thee, master!

EARL OF GLOSTER.

Here, take this purse, thou whom the heavens' plagues

---

[1] **Above the rest:** at any rate.
[2] **'parel:** apparel.
[3] **daub:** conceal; dissemble (*daub* is used in plastering).
[4] **Obidicut:** Hoberdicut (from Harsnett's *Declaration*).
[5] **mopping and mowing:** making grimaces and petulant expressions (*mowing* is from *moue*).

Have humbled to all strokes: that I am wretched
Makes thee the happier:—heavens, deal so still!
Let the superfluous and lust-dieted man,[1]
That slaves your ordinance,[2] that will not see
Because he doth not feel, feel your power quickly;
So distribution should undo excess,
And each man have enough.—Dost thou know Dover?

EDGAR.

Ay, master.

EARL OF GLOSTER.

There is a cliff, whose high and bending head
Looks fearfully in the confined deep:
Bring me but to the very brim of it,
And I'll repair the misery thou dost bear
With something rich about me:[3] from that place
I shall no leading need.

EDGAR.

Give me thy arm:
Poor Tom shall lead thee. [*Exeunt.*

SCENE II.

Before the DUKE OF ALBANY'S *palace.*

Enter GONERIL *and* EDMUND.

GONERIL.

Welcome, my lord; I marvel our mild husband
Not met us on the way.[4]

Enter OSWALD.

Now, where's your master?

OSWALD.

Madam, within; but never man so changed.

---

[1] **the superfluous and lust-dieted man:** the man having more than enough for his needs and whose every desire is catered to (pampered). [2] **That slaves your ordinance:** who takes his good fortune for granted. [3] **something rich about me:** something valuable that I have. [4] **on the way:** on the way from the castle of Gloucester.

I told him of the army that was landed;
He smiled at it: I told him you were coming;
His answer was, 'The worse:' of Gloster's treachery,
And of the loyal service of his son,
When I inform'd him, then he call'd me sot,
And told me I had turn'd the wrong side out:—
What most he should dislike seems pleasant to him;
What like, offensive.

GONERIL [*to* EDMUND].

Then shall you go no further.
It is the cowish[1] terror of his spirit,
That dares not undertake: he'll not feel wrongs,
Which tie him to an answer.[2] Our wishes on the way
May prove effects.[3] Back, Edmund, to my brother;
Hasten his musters and conduct his powers:[4]
I must change[5] arms[6] at home, and give the distaff
Into my husband's hands. This trusty servant
Shall pass between us: ere long you are like[7] to hear,
If you dare venture in your own behalf,
A mistress's command. Wear this; spare speech;

[*Giving a favour.*

Decline your head: this kiss, if it durst speak,
Would stretch thy spirits up into the air:—
Conceive,[8] and fare thee well.

EDMUND.

Yours in the ranks of death.

GONERIL.

My most dear Gloster!

[*Exit* EDMUND.

---

[1] **cowish:** cowardly. [2] **he'll not feel wrongs,/Which tie him to an answer:** i.e., he ignores insults which should be avenged. [3] **May prove effects:** may be fulfilled. [4] **conduct his powers:** lead his forces. [5] **change:** exchange. [6] **arms:** the sword and distaff (*insignia of the male and female sexes*). [7] **like:** likely. [8] **conceive:** understand (my meaning).

O, the difference of man and man! To thee
A woman's services are due: my fool [1]
Usurps my body.

OSWALD.

Madam, here comes my lord. [*Exit.*

Enter ALBANY.

GONERIL.

I have been worth the whistle.[2]

DUKE OF ALBANY.

O Goneril!
You are not worth the dust which the rude wind
Blows in your face. I fear your disposition:
That nature which contemns its origin
Cannot be border'd certain in itself;[3]
She that herself will sliver and disbranch[4]
From her material sap,[5] perforce must wither,
And come to deadly use.

GONERIL.

No more; the text is foolish.

DUKE OF ALBANY.

Wisdom and goodness to the vile seem vile:
Filths savour but themselves. What have you done?
Tigers, not daughters, what have you perform'd?
A father, and a gracious aged man,
Whose reverence the head-lugg'd bear[6] would lick,
Most barbarous, most degenerate! have you madded.[7]
Could my good brother suffer you to do it?
A man, a prince, by him so benefited!
If that the heavens do not their visible spirits
Send quickly down to tame these vile offences,[8]
It will come,

---

[1] **my fool:** my husband. [2] **I have been worth the whistle:** that is, once she rated higher in his esteem, and he would have come to meet her. [3] **Cannot be border'd certain in itself:** cannot be trusted to stay within its fixed limits. [4] **sliver and disbranch:** split and cut off. [5] **material sap:** essential nourishment (her father). [6] **head-lugg'd bear:** a bear with its head torn in bear-baiting. [7] **madded:** driven mad. [8] **offences:** offenders.

Humanity must perforce prey on itself,
Like monsters of the deep.

GONERIL.

Milk-liver'd man!
That bear'st a cheek for blows, a head for wrongs;
Who hast not in thy brows an eye discerning
Thine honour from thy suffering;[1] that not know'st
Fools do those villains pity who are punisht
Ere they have done their mischief. Where's thy drum?
France spreads his banners in our noiseless[2] land;
With plumed helm[3] thy slayer begins threats;
Whiles thou, a moral fool, sitt'st still, and criest
'Alack, why does he so?'

DUKE OF ALBANY.

See thyself, devil!
Proper deformity seems not in the fiend
So horrid as in woman.[4]

GONERIL.

O vain[5] fool!

DUKE OF ALBANY.

Thou changed[6] and self-cover'd thing, for shame,
Be-monster not thy feature. Were't my fitness
To let these hands obey my blood,[7]
They are apt enough to dislocate and tear
Thy flesh and bones:—howe'er thou art a fiend,
A woman's shape doth shield thee.

GONERIL.

Marry,[8] your manhood! mew!

Enter a MESSENGER.

DUKE OF ALBANY.

What news?

---

[1] **Who . . . suffering:** who cannot see the difference between what can be honorably borne by you and what is an insult to your honor. [2] **noiseless:** unready for battle. [3] **helm:** helmet. [4] **proper deformity . . . woman:** deformity is proper in a fiend, but not in a woman. [5] **vain:** useless. [6] **changed:** transformed. [7] **blood:** anger. [8] **Marry:** by the Virgin Mary.

MESSENGER.

O, my good lord, the Duke of Cornwall's dead;
Slain by his servant, going to[1] put out
The other eye of Gloster.

DUKE OF ALBANY.

Gloster's eyes!

MESSENGER.

A servant that he bred, thrill'd [2] with remorse,[3]
Opposed against the act, bending his sword
To his great master; who, thereat enraged,
Flew on him, and amongst them fell'd him dead;
But not without that harmful stroke which since
Hath pluckt him after.

DUKE OF ALBANY.

This shows you are above,
You justicers,[4] that these our nether crimes[5]
So speedily can venge! [6]—But, O poor Gloster!
Lost he his other eye?

MESSENGER.

Both, both, my lord.—
This letter, madam, craves a speedy answer;
'Tis from your sister.

GONERIL [*aside*].

One way I like this well;
But being widow, and my Gloster with her,
May all the building in my fancy pluck
Upon my hateful life:[7] another way
The news is not so tart.[8]—I'll read, and answer. [*Exit.*

DUKE OF ALBANY.

Where was his son when they did take his eyes?

MESSENGER.

Come with my lady hither.

---

[1] **going to:** while he was going to. [2] **thrill'd:** pierced. [3] **remorse:** pity; compassion. [4] **justicers:** judges. [5] **nether crimes:** crimes in the world below. [6] **venge:** avenge. [7] **May all the building in my fancy pluck/Upon my hateful life:** all my castles in the air may be taken from me and my life made wretched. [8] **tart:** painful; sharp.

DUKE OF ALBANY.

He is not here.

MESSENGER.

No, my good lord; I met him back again.[1]

DUKE OF ALBANY.

Knows he the wickedness?

MESSENGER.

Ay, my good lord; 'twas he inform'd against him;
And quit the house on purpose, that their punishment
Might have the freer course.

DUKE OF ALBANY.

Gloster, I live
To thank thee for the love thou show'dst the king,
And to revenge thine eyes.—Come hither, friend:
Tell me what more thou know'st. [*Exeunt.*

Scene III.

The French camp near Dover.

Enter KENT *and a* GENTLEMAN.

EARL OF KENT.

Why the King of France is so suddenly gone back know you the reason?

GENTLEMAN.

Something he left imperfect in the state, which since his coming forth is thought of; which imports[2] to the kingdom so much fear and danger, that his personal return was most required and necessary.

EARL OF KENT.

Who hath he left behind him general?

GENTLEMAN.

The Marshal of France, Monsieur La Far.

---

[1] I met him back again: I met him on his way back.
[2] imports: portends.

EARL OF KENT.

Did your letters pierce the queen to any demonstration of grief?

GENTLEMAN.

Ay, sir; she took them, read them in my presence;
And now and then an ample tear trill'd[1] down
Her delicate cheek: it seem'd she was a queen
Over her passion; who, most rebel-like,
Sought to be king o'er her.

EARL OF KENT.

O, then it moved her.

GENTLEMAN.

Not to a rage: patience and sorrow strove
Who should express her goodliest.[2] You have seen
Sunshine and rain at once: her smiles and tears
Were like a better way:[3] those happy smilets
That play'd on her ripe lip seem'd not to know
What guests were in her eyes; which parted thence
As pearls from diamonds dropt.—*In brief*,
Sorrow would be a rarity most beloved,
If all could so become it.

EARL OF KENT.

Made she no verbal question?

GENTLEMAN.

Faith, once or twice she heaved the name of 'father'
Pantingly forth, as if it prest her heart;
Cried 'Sisters, sisters!—Shame of ladies! sisters!
Kent! father! sisters! What, i'the storm? i'the night?
Let pity not be believed!'—There she shook
The holy water from her heavenly eyes,
And clamour moisten'd:[4] then away she started
To deal with grief alone.

---

[1] **trill'd**: trickled.

[2] **patience and sorrow strove/ Who should express her goodliest**: self-control and sadness vied with each other to see which could make her the more lovely.

[3] **Were . . . better way**: were like that, but in a more beautiful way.

[4] **clamour moisten'd**: her lamentations were mixed with tears.

EARL OF KENT.

It is the stars,
The stars above us, govern our conditions;[1]
Else one self mate and mate[2] could not beget
Such different issues.[3] You spoke not with her since?

GENTLEMAN.

No.

EARL OF KENT.

Was this before the king return'd?

GENTLEMAN.

No, since.

EARL OF KENT.

Well, sir, the poor distressed Lear's i'the town;
Who sometime, in his better tune,[4] remembers
What we are come about, and by no means
Will yield to see his daughter.

GENTLEMAN.

Why, good sir?

EARL OF KENT.

A sovereign shame[5] so elbows him: his own unkindness,
That stript her from his benediction, turn'd her[6]
To foreign casualties,[7] gave her dear rights
To his dog-hearted daughters,—these things sting
His mind so venomously that burning shame
Detains him from Cordelia.

GENTLEMAN.

Alack, poor gentleman!

EARL OF KENT.

Of Albany's and Cornwall's powers you heard not?

GENTLEMAN.

'Tis so, they are a-foot.[8]

---

[1] conditions: characters. [2] mate and mate: husband and wife. [3] issues: children. [4] in his better tune: in his more rational moments. [5] A sovereign shame: an overmastering shame. [6] turn'd her: turned her out. [7] To foreign casualties: to take her chances among foreigners. [8] a-foot: on the march.

EARL OF KENT.

Well, sir, I'll bring you to our master Lear,
And leave you to attend him: some dear cause[1]
Will in concealment wrap me up awhile;
When I am known aright, you shall not grieve[2]
Lending me this acquaintance.[3] I pray you, go
Along with me. [*Exeunt.*

SCENE IV.

The same. A tent.

Enter, with drum and colours, CORDELIA, DOCTOR, *and* SOLDIERS

CORDELIA.

Alack, 'tis he: why, he was met even now
As mad as the vext sea; singing aloud;
Crown'd with rank[4] fumiter[5] and furrow-weeds,
With bur-docks, hemlock, nettles, cuckoo-flowers,[6]
Darnel,[7] and all the idle[8] weeds that grow
In our sustaining corn.—A century[9] send forth;
Search every acre in the high-grown field,
And bring him to our eye. [*Exit an* OFFICER.]—What can man's wisdom[10]
In the restoring his bereaved sense?
He that helps him take all my outward worth.

DOCTOR.

There is means, madam:
Our foster-nurse of nature is repose,
The which he lacks; that to provoke in him
Are many simples[11] operative, whose power
Will close the eye of anguish.

CORDELIA. All blest secrets,
All you unpublisht virtues of the earth,
Spring with my tears! be aidant and remediate[12]

---

[1] **dear cause:** important reason. [2] **grieve:** regret. [3] **Lending . . . acquaintance:** having known me. [4] **rank:** luxuriant. [5] **fumiter:** fumitory—formerly used as a medicine. [6] **cuckoo-flowers:** ragged robins. [7] **Darnel:** a weed found in cultivated ground. [8] **idle:** worthless. [9] **century:** armed body of one hundred men. [10] **What can man's wisdom:** what can man's knowledge of science do. [11] **simples:** medicinal herbs. [12] **be aidant and remediate:** be helpful and curative.

In the good man's distress!—Seek, seek for him;
Lest his ungovern'd rage[1] dissolve the life
That wants[2] the means to lead it.

Enter a MESSENGER.

MESSENGER.

News, madam;
The British powers[3] are marching hitherward.

CORDELIA.

'Tis known before; our preparation stands
In expectation of them.—O dear father,
It is thy business that I go about;
Therefore great France
My mourning and important[4] tears hath pitied.
No blown[5] ambition doth our arms incite,
But love, dear love, and our aged father's right:
Soon may I hear and see him! [*Exeunt.*

Scene V.

A room in GLOSTER's *castle.*

Enter REGAN *and* OSWALD.

REGAN.

But are my brother's powers set forth?

OSWALD.

Ay, madam.

REGAN.

Himself in person there?

OSWALD.

Madam, with much ado:[6]
Your sister is the better soldier.

REGAN.

Lord Edmund spake not with your lord at home?

---

[1] **rage**: frenzy.
[2] **wants**: lacks.
[3] **powers**: forces.
[4] **important**: importunate.
[5] **blown**: swollen with pride (in the expectation of conquest).
[6] **with much ado**: after much to-do (fuss) and pleading.

OSWALD.

No, madam.

REGAN.

What might import[1] my sister's letter to him?

OSWALD.

I know not, lady.

REGAN.

Faith, he is posted hence on serious matter.
It was great ignorance, Gloster's eyes being out,[2]
To let him live: where he arrives he moves
All hearts against us: Edmund, I think, is gone,
In pity of his misery, to dispatch
His nighted[3] life; moreover, to descry[4]
The strength o'the'enemy.

OSWALD.

I must needs after him, madam, with my letter.

REGAN.

Our troops set forth to-morrow: stay with us;
The ways are dangerous.

OSWALD.

I may not, madam:
My lady charged my duty[5] in this business.

REGAN.

Why should she write to Edmund? Might not you
Transport her purposes by word? Belike,[6]
Something—I know not what:—I'll love thee much,
Let me unseal the letter.

OSWALD.

Madam, I had rather—

REGAN.

I know your lady does not love her husband;
I am sure of that: and at her late being here
She gave strange œilliades[7] and most speaking[8] looks
To noble Edmund. I know you are of her bosom.[9]

---

[1] **import**: signify. [2] **being out**: being put out. [3] **nighted**: blinded. **descry**: spy out. [5] **charged my duty**: commanded me to carry out her instructions. [6] **Belike**: probably. [7] **œilliades**: coquettish glances. [8] **most speaking**: very expressive. [9] **of her bosom**: in her confidence.

OSWALD.

I, madam?

REGAN.

I speak in understanding;[1] you are, I know't:
Therefore I do advise you, take this note:[2]
My lord is dead; Edmund and I have talkt;[3]
And more convenient[4] is he for my hand
Than for your lady's:—you may gather more.[5]
If you do find him, pray you, give him this;
And when your mistress hears thus much[6] from you,
I pray, desire her call her wisdom to her.
So, fare you well.
If you do chance to hear of that blind traitor,
Preferment falls on him that cuts him off.

OSWALD.

Would I could meet him, madam! I would show
What party I do follow.

REGAN.

Fare thee well. [*Exeunt.*

SCENE VI.

The country near Dover.

Enter GLOSTER, *and* EDGAR *drest like a peasant.*

EARL OF GLOSTER.

When shall I come to the top of that same hill?

EDGAR.

You do climb up it now: look, how we labour.

EARL OF GLOSTER.

Methinks the ground is even.

---

[1] **I speak in understanding:** I speak from knowledge. [2] **take this note:** take note of this. [3] **have talkt:** have come to an understanding. [4] **convenient:** suitable. [5] **you may gather more:** you may gather more about the matter from my hints. [6] **thus much:** what I have imparted to you.

EDGAR.

Horrible steep.

Hark, do you hear the sea?

EARL OF GLOSTER.

No, truly.

EDGAR.

Why, then, your other senses grow imperfect
By your eyes' anguish.[1]

EARL OF GLOSTER.

So may it be, indeed:
Methinks thy voice is alter'd; and thou speak'st
In better phrase and matter[2] than thou didst.

EDGAR.

Y'are much deceived: in nothing am I changed
But in my garments.

EARL OF GLOSTER.

Methinks y'are better spoken.

EDGAR.

Come on, sir; here's the place:—stand still.—How fearful
And dizzy 'tis to cast one's eyes so low!
The crows and choughs[3] that wing the midway air
Show scarce so gross[4] as beetles: half way down
Hangs one that gathers samphire,[5]—dreadful trade!
Methinks he seems no bigger than his head:
The fishermen, that walk upon the beach,
Appear like mice; and yond tall anchoring bark,
Diminisht to her cock,[6]—her cock, a buoy
Almost too small for sight: the murmuring surge,[7]
That on the unnumber'd idle pebbles chafes,
Cannot be heard so high.—I'll look no more;
Lest my brain turn, and the deficient sight
Topple down[8] headlong.

---

[1] **By your eyes' anguish:** because of the loss of your eyes. [2] **In better phrase and matter:** *in a more cultured accent* and with more intelligence. [3] **choughs:** jackdaws. [4] **gross:** large. [5] **samphire:** an aromatic herb growing along the European sea-coast, sometimes used for pickles. [6] **cock:** cockboat, a small ship's boat. [7] **surge:** surf. [8] **Topple down:** topple me down.

EARL OF GLOSTER.

Set me where you stand.

EDGAR.

Give me your hand:—you are now within a foot
Of the extreme verge: for all beneath the moon
Would I not leap upright.[1]

EARL OF GLOSTER.

Let go my hand.
Here, friend, 's another purse; in it a jewel
Well worth a poor man's taking: fairies and gods
Prosper it with thee! Go thou further off;
Bid me farewell, and let me hear thee going.

EDGAR.

Now fare you well, good sir.

EARL OF GLOSTER.

With all my heart.

EDGAR [*aside*].

Why I do trifle thus with his despair
Is done to cure it.

EARL OF GLOSTER [*kneeling*].

O you mighty gods!
This world I do renounce, and, in your sights,
Shake patiently my great affliction off:
If I could bear it longer, and not fall
To quarrel with your great opposeless wills,[2]
My snuff[3] and loathed part of nature[4] should
Burn itself out. If Edgar live, O, bless him!—
Now, fellow, fare thee well.

EDGAR.

Gone, sir:—farewell.
[GLOSTER *falls forward.*
[*aside*] And yet I know not how conceit[5] may rob
The treasury of life, when life itself

---

[1] **leap upright:** Edgar means that he is so near the edge that if he jumped straight up, he would fall off.
[2] **opposeless wills:** unalterable judgments.
[3] **snuff:** the smoldering wick of a candle.
[4] **loathed part of nature:** hated old age.
[5] **conceit:** delusion.

Yields to the theft: had he been where he thought,
By this had thought been past.—Alive or dead?
Ho you, sir! friend!—Hear you, sir! speak!
[*aside*] Thus might he pass indeed: yet he revives.—
What are you, sir?

EARL OF GLOSTER.

Away, and let me die.

EDGAR.

Hadst thou been aught but gossamer, feathers, air,
So many fathom down precipitating,
Thou'dst shiver'd like an egg:[1] but thou dost breathe;
Hast heavy substance; bleed'st not; speak'st; art sound.
Ten masts at each[2] make not the altitude
Which thou hast perpendicularly fell:
Thy life's a miracle. Speak yet again.

EARL OF GLOSTER.

But have I faln, or no?

EDGAR.

From the dread summit of this chalky bourn.[3]
Look up a-height;[4]—the shrill-gorged [5] lark so far
Cannot be seen or heard: do but look up.

EARL OF GLOSTER.

Alack, I have no eyes.—
Is wretchedness deprived that benefit
To end itself by death? 'Twas yet some comfort,
When misery could beguile[6] the tyrant's rage,
And frustrate his proud will.

EDGAR.

Give me your arm:
Up:—so.—How is't? Feel you your legs?[7] You stand.

---

[1] **Thou'dst shiver'd like an egg:** you would be cracked open like an egg. [2] **Ten masts at each:** ten masts, one on top of the other. [3] **bourn:** boundary of the sea. [4] **a-height:** on high. [5] **shrill-gorged:** shrill-voiced. [6] **beguile:** cheat. [7] **Feel you your legs:** do you have feeling in your legs.

EARL OF GLOSTER.

Too well, too well.

EDGAR.

This is above all strangeness.[1]
Upon the crown o'the cliff, what thing was that
Which parted from you?

EARL OF GLOSTER.

A poor unfortunate beggar.

EDGAR.

As I stood here below, methought his eyes
Were two full moons; he had a thousand noses,
Horns whelkt and waved [2] like the enridged [3] sea:
It was some fiend; therefore, thou happy[4] father,[5]
Think that the clearest gods, who make them honours
Of men's impossibilities,[6] have preserved thee.

EARL OF GLOSTER.

I do remember now: henceforth I'll bear
Affliction till it do cry out itself
'Enough, enough,' and die. That thing you speak of,
I took it for a man; often 'twould say
'The fiend, the fiend:' he led me to that place.

EDGAR.

Bear free[7] and patient thoughts.—But who comes here?

Enter LEAR, *fantastically drest with wild flowers.*

The safer sense will ne'er accommodate
His master thus.[8]

KING LEAR.

No, they cannot touch me for coining;[9] I am the king himself.

---

[1] **above all strangeness:** beyond belief. [2] **whelkt and waved:** ridged (like a shell) and twisted. [3] **enridged:** ridged; wave-furrowed. [4] **happy:** *fortunate.* [5] **father:** used in a general sense. [6] **who . . . impossibilities:** who are honored because they can perform miracles impossible to man. [7] **free:** happy. [8] **The safer . . . thus:** that is, no one in his right mind would bedeck himself in this manner. [9] **coining:** counterfeiting.

EDGAR *[aside]*.

O thou side-piercing sight!

KING LEAR.

Nature's above art in that respect.—There's your press-money.[1] That fellow handles his bow like a crow-keeper:[2] draw me a clothier's yard.[3]—Look, look, a mouse! Peace, peace;—this piece of toasted cheese will do't.—There's my gauntlet;[4] I'll prove it on a giant.—Bring up the brown bills.[5] —O, well flown, bird!—i'the clout,[6] i'the clout, hewgh![7]— Give the word.

EDGAR.

Sweet marjoram.

KING LEAR.

Pass.

EARL OF GLOSTER.

I know that voice.

KING LEAR.

Ha! Goneril,—with a white beard!—They flatter'd me like a dog; and told me I had white hairs in my beard ere the black ones were there.[8]—To say 'ay' and 'no' to every thing that I said!—'Ay' and 'no' too was no good divinity.[9] When the rain came to wet me once, and the wind to make me chatter; when the thunder would not peace[10] at my bidding; there I found 'em, there I smelt 'em out. Go to, they are not men o' their words: they told me I was every thing; 'tis a lie,—I am not ague-proof.[11]

EARL OF GLOSTER.

The trick[12] of that voice I do well remember:
Is't not the king?

KING LEAR.

Ay, every inch a king:

---

[1] **press-money:** money paid to recruits. [2] **crow-keeper:** scarecrow. [3] **clothier's yard:** the length of an English arrow. [4] **gauntlet:** leather glove (to throw it down was a challenge). [5] **the brown bills:** halberds; the infantry. [6] **clout:** bull's eye. [7] **hewgh:** sound of arrow in flight. [8] **told . . . there:** told me I was a sage before I sprouted a beard. [9] **no good divinity:** not good theology. [10] **peace:** be quiet. [11] **ague-proof:** impervious to chills. [12] **trick:** way of speaking.

When I do stare, see how the subject quakes!
I pardon that man's life.—What was thy cause?—
Adultery?
Thou shalt not die: die for adultery! No:
The wren goes to't, and the small gilded fly
Does lecher in my sight.
Let copulation thrive: for Gloster's bastard son
Was kinder to his father than my daughters
Got 'tween the lawful sheets.
To't, luxury,[1] pell-mell! [2] for I lack soldiers.—
Behold yond simpering dame,
Whose face between her forks[3] presages snow,
That minces[4] virtue, and does shake the head
To hear of pleasure's name,—
The fitchew[5] nor the soiled horse goes to't
With a more riotous appetite.
Down from the waist they are Centaurs,[6]
Though women all above:
But to the girdle[7] do the gods inherit,
Beneath is all the fiends';
There's hell, there's darkness, there's the sulphurous pit,
burning, scalding, stench, consumption;—fie, fie, fie! pah, pah! Give me an ounce of civet, good apothecary, to sweeten my imagination: there's money for thee.

EARL OF GLOSTER.

O, let me kiss that hand!

KING LEAR.

Let me wipe it first; it smells of mortality.[8]

EARL OF GLOSTER.

O ruin'd piece of nature! This great world
Shall so wear outto naught.—Dost thou know me?

---

[1] **luxury**: lust. [2] **pell-mell**: indiscriminately. [3] **forks**: legs; but here referring to ornamental combs for the hair. [4] **minces**: affects. [5] **fitchew**: polecat. [6] **Centaurs**: beasts. [7] **to the girdle**: above the waist. [8] **mortality**: death.

KING LEAR.

I remember thine eyes well enough. Dost thou squiny[1] at me? No, do thy worst, blind Cupid; I'll not love.—Read thou this challenge; mark but the penning on't.

EARL OF GLOSTER.

Were all the letters suns, I could not see one.

EDGAR [*aside*].

I would not take this from report;[2]—it is,
And my heart breaks at it.

KING LEAR.

Read.

EARL OF GLOSTER.

What, with the case[3] of eyes?

KING LEAR.

O, ho, are you there with me? No eyes in your head, nor no money in your purse? Your eyes are in a heavy case, your purse in a light: yet you see how this world goes.

EARL OF GLOSTER.

I see it feelingly.

KING LEAR.

What, art mad? A man may see how this world goes with no eyes. Look with thine ears: see how yond justice rails upon yond simple thief. Hark, in thine ear: change places; and, handy-dandy,[4] which is the justice, which is the thief? —Thou hast seen a farmer's dog bark at a beggar?

EARL OF GLOSTER.

Ay, sir.

KING LEAR.

And the creature[5] run from the cur? There thou mightst be-

---

[1] **squiny**: look sideways.
[2] **report**: rumor.
[3] **case**: sockets.
[4] **handy-dandy**: meaning, "take your choice" (a children's game).
[5] **creature**: man.

hold the great image of authority: a dog's obey'd in office.[1]—
Thou rascal beadle,[2] hold thy bloody hand!
Why dost thou lash that whore? Strip thine own back;
Thou hotly lusts to use her in that kind
For which thou whipst her. The usurer[3] hangs the cozener.[4]
Through tatter'd clothes small vices do appear;
Robes and furr'd gowns hide all. Plate sin with gold,
And the strong lance of justice hurtless breaks;
Arm it in rags, a pigmy's straw does pierce it.
None does offend, none,—I say, none; I'll able 'em:[5]
Take that of me, my friend, who have the power
To seal the accuser's lips. Get thee glass eyes;[6]
And, like a scurvy politician, seem
To see the things thou dost not.—Now, now, now, now:
Pull off my boots:—harder, harder:—so.

EDGAR [*aside*].

O, matter and impertinency[7] mixt!
Reason in madness!

KING LEAR.

If thou wilt weep my fortunes, take my eyes.
I know thee well enough; thy name is Gloster:
Thou must be patient; we came crying hither:
Thou know'st, the first time that we smell the air,
We wawl and cry.—I will preach to thee: mark.

EARL OF GLOSTER.

Alack, alack the day!

KING LEAR.

When we are born, we cry that we are come
To this great stage of fools.—This' a good block:[8]—

---

[1] **a dog's obey'd in office:** that is, anyone is obeyed when he holds a position of authority. [2] **beadle:** parish constable. [3] **usurer:** a judge guilty of usury. [4] **cozener:** petty thief. [5] **able em:** vouch for them. [6] **glass eyes:** spectacles. [7] **matter and impertinency:** sense and nonsense. [8] **This' a good block:** as Lear takes off his hat to preach, he remarks, "This is a good hat."

It were a delicate[1] stratagem to shoe
A troop of horse with felt: I'll put't in proof;[2]
And when I have stoln upon these sons-in-law,
Then, kill, kill, kill, kill, kill, kill!

Enter a GENTLEMAN, *with* ATTENDANTS.

GENTLEMAN.

O, here he is: lay hand upon him.—Sir,
Your most dear daughter—

KING LEAR.

No rescue? What, a prisoner? I am even
The natural fool of fortune.[3]—Use me well;
You shall have ransom. Let me have a surgeon;
I am cut to the brains.

GENTLEMAN.

You shall have any thing.

KING LEAR.

No seconds? all myself?
Why, this would make a man a man of salt,[4]
To use his eyes for garden water-pots,
Ay, and laying autumn's dust.

GENTLEMAN.

Good sir,—

KING LEAR.

I will die bravely, like a smug[5] bridegroom. What!
I will be jovial: come, come; I am a king;
My masters, know you that.

GENTLEMAN.

You are a royal one, and we obey you.

KING LEAR.

Then there's life in't. Nay, an you get it, you shall get it by running. Sa, sa, sa, sa.[6]

[*Exit running.* ATTENDANTS *follow.*

---

[1] delicate: neat. [2] I'll put't in proof: I'll test it out. [3] I am even/The natural fool of fortune: I was born to be fortune's plaything. [4] a man of salt: i.e., full of salty tears. [5] smug: dapper; self-satisfied. [6] Sa, sa, sa, sa: a hunting cry to urge on the dogs; also a rallying cry.

GENTLEMAN.

A sight most pitiful in the meanest wretch,
Past speaking of in a king!—Thou hast one daughter,
Who redeems nature from the general curse
Which twain have brought her to.

EDGAR.

Hail, gentle sir.

GENTLEMAN.

Sir, speed you: what's your will?

EDGAR.

Do you hear aught, sir, of a battle toward? [1]

GENTLEMAN.

Most sure and vulgar:[2] every one hears that,
Which can distinguish sound.

EDGAR.

But, by your favour,
How near's the other army?

GENTLEMAN.

Near and on speedy foot;[3] the main descry
Stands on the hourly thought.[4]

EDGAR.

I thank you, sir: that's all.

GENTLEMAN.

Though that the queen on special cause is here,
Her army is moved on.

EDGAR.

I thank you, sir.

[*Exit* GENTLEMAN.

EARL OF GLOSTER.

You ever-gentle gods, take my breath from me;
Let not my worser spirit[5] tempt me again
To die before you please!

---

[1] **toward**: about to take place.
[2] **vulgar**: common knowledge.
[3] **on speedy foot**: approaching rapidly.
[4] **the main descry/Stands on the hourly thought**: We expect to see the main body of the army from hour to hour.
[5] **my worser spirit**: the evil side of my nature.

EDGAR.

Well pray you, father.

EARL OF GLOSTER.

Now, good sir, what are you?

EDGAR.

A most poor man, made tame to fortune's blows;
Who, by the art of known and feeling sorrows,
Am pregnant to good pity.[1] Give me your hand,
I'll lead you to some biding.[2]

EARL OF GLOSTER.

Hearty thanks:
The bounty and the benison of heaven
To boot, and boot! [3]

Enter OSWALD.

OSWALD.

A proclaim'd prize! Most happy!
That eyeless head of thine was first framed flesh
To raise my fortunes.—Thou old unhappy traitor,
Briefly thyself remember:[4]—the sword is out
That must destroy thee.

EARL OF GLOSTER.

Now let thy friendly hand
Put strength enough to't. [EDGAR *interposes.*

OSWALD.

Wherefore, bold peasant
Darest thou support a publisht[5] traitor? Hence;
Lest that the infection of his fortune take
Like hold on thee. Let go his arm.

EDGAR.

Chill not let go, zir, without vurther 'casion.[6]

OSWALD.

Let go, slave, or thou diest!

---

[1] **Am pregnant to good pity:** is ready to give sympathy. [2] **biding:** abode. [3] **To boot, and boot:** to reward you to the highest degree. [4] **Briefly thyself remember:** reflect on your sins (and prepare for death). [5] **publisht:** proclaimed. [6] **Chill not let go, zir, without vurther 'casion:** I will not let you go, sir, without further reason (Edgar is using a Cotswold dialect).

EDGAR.

Good gentleman, go your gait,[1] and let poor volk[2] pass. An chud[3] ha' bin zwagger'd out of my life, 'twould not ha' bin zo long as 'tis by a vortnight.[4] Nay, come not near the old man; keep out, che vor ye,[5] or ise[6] try whether your costard[7] or my ballow[8] be the harder: chill be plain with you.

OSWALD.

Out, dunghill!

EDGAR.

Chill pick your teeth, zir: come; no matter vor your foins.[9]

[*They fight, and* EDGAR *knocks him down.*

OSWALD.

Slave, thou hast slain me:—villain,[10] take my purse:
If ever thou wilt thrive, bury my body;
And give the letters which thou find'st about me
To Edmund earl of Gloster; seek him out
Upon the English party:—O, untimely death!
Death! [*Dies.*

EDGAR.

I know thee well: a serviceable villain;
As duteous to the vices of thy mistress
As badness would desire.

EARL OF GLOSTER.

What, is he dead?

EDGAR.

Sit you down, father; rest you.—
Let's see his pockets: these letters that he speaks of
May be my friends.[11]—He's dead; I am only sorry
He had no other death's-man.[12]—Let us see:—
Leave,[13] gentle wax; and, manners, blame us not:
To know our enemies' minds, we'ld rip their hearts;

---

[1] gait: way. [2] volk: folk. [3] chud: if I should. [4] vortnight: fortnight (two weeks). [5] che vor ye: I warn you. [6] ise: I shall. [7] costard: apple; here, slang for *head*. [8] ballow: cudgel. [9] foins: sword thrusts. [10] villain: serf. [11] May be my friends: may aid in exonerating me. [12] death's-man: executioner. [13] Leave: by your leave.

Their papers, is more lawful.

[*Reads*] Let our reciprocal vows be remember'd. You have many opportunities to cut him off: if your will want not, time and place will be fruitfully[1] offer'd. There is nothing done, if he return the conqueror: then am I the prisoner, and his bed my gaol; from the warmth loathed whereof deliver me, and supply the place for your labour.

Your—wife, so I would say—
Affectionate servant,

GONERIL.

O undistinguisht space of woman's will![2]
A plot upon her virtuous husband's life;
And the exchange my brother!—Here, in the sands,
Thee I'll rake up,[3] the post unsanctified[4]
Of murderous lechers: and, in the mature time,
With this ungracious[5] paper strike the sight
Of the death-practised duke:[6] for him 'tis well
That of thy death and business I can tell.

EARL OF GLOSTER.

The king is mad: how stiff[7] is my vile sense,
That I stand up, and have ingenious[8] feeling
Of my huge sorrows! Better I were distract:[9]
So should my thoughts be sever'd from my griefs,
And woes, by wrong imaginations, lose
The knowledge of themselves.

EDGAR.

Give me your hand:
[*Drum afar off.*
Far off, methinks, I hear the beaten drum:
Come, father, I'll bestow[10] you with a friend. [*Exeunt.*

---

[1] **fruitfully**: plentifully. [2] **undistinguisht . . . will**: limitless scope of (this) woman's desires. [3] **rake up**: cover up (bury). [4] **post unsanctified**: unholy messenger. [5] **ungracious**: wicked. [6] **death-practised duke**: the duke whose death is being plotted (the Duke of Albany). [7] **stiff**: tough; unbending. [8] **ingenious**: conscious. [9] **distract**: insane. [10] **bestow**: lodge.

Scene VII.

A tent in the French camp.

Enter CORDELIA, KENT, DOCTOR, *and* GENTLEMAN.

CORDELIA.

O thou good Kent, how shall I live and work,
To match thy goodness? My life will be too short,
And every measure fail me.

EARL OF KENT.

To be acknowledged, madam, *is* o'erpaid.
All my reports go with the modest truth;
Nor more nor clipt,[1] but so.

CORDELIA.

Be better suited:[2]
These weeds[3] are memories of those worser hours:
I prithee, put them off.

EARL OF KENT.

Pardon, dear madam;
Yet to be known shortens my made intent:[4]
My boon I make it,[5] that you know me not
Till time and I think meet.[6]

CORDELIA.

Then be't so, my good lord.—[*to the* DOCTOR] How does the king?

DOCTOR.

Madam, sleeps still.

CORDELIA.

O you kind gods,
Cure this great breach in his abused nature!
Th'untuned and jarring senses, O, wind up
Of this child-changed[7] father!

---

[1] **nor more nor clipt:** no more nor less; neither exaggerated nor made less of. [2] **suited:** clothed. [3] **weeds:** garments. [4] **shortens my made intent:** upsets my plans. [5] **My boon I make it:** I ask it as a favor. [6] **meet:** appropriate. [7] **child-changed:** "changed to a child"—Steevens; changed in mind by the cruelty of his children—Malone.

DOCTOR.

So please your majesty
That we may wake the king: he hath slept long.

CORDELIA.

Be govern'd by your knowledge, and proceed
I'the sway of your own will.[1] Is he array'd?

Enter LEAR *in a chair carried by* SERVANTS.

GENTLEMAN.

Ay, madam; in the heaviness of sleep
We put fresh garments on him.

DOCTOR.

Be by,[2] good madam, when we do awake him;
I doubt not of his temperance.[3]

CORDELIA.

Very well.

DOCTOR.

Please you, draw near.—Louder the music there!

CORDELIA.

O my dear father! Restoration hang
Thy medicine on my lips; and let this kiss
Repair those violent harms that my two sisters
Have in thy reverence made!

EARL OF KENT.

Kind and dear princess!

CORDELIA.

Had you not been their father, these white flakes[4]
Had challenged pity of them. Was this a face
To be opposed against the warring winds?
To stand against the deep dread-bolted thunder?
In the most terrible and nimble stroke
Of quick, cross lightning? [5] to watch—poor perdu![6]—
With this thin helm? [7] Mine enemy's dog,

---

[1] will: judgment. [2] by: near. [3] temperance: sanity. [4] white flakes: snowy locks. [5] cross lightning: forked lightning. [6] perdu: a sentinel whose post means almost certain death. [7] thin helm: bare head.

Though he had bit me, should have stood that night
Against my fire; and wast thou fain,[1] poor father,
To hovel thee with swine, and rogues forlorn,
In short[2] and musty straw? Alack, alack!
'Tis wonder that thy life and wits at once
Had not concluded all.[3]—He wakes; speak to him.

DOCTOR.

Madam, do you: 'tis fittest.

CORDELIA.

How does my royal lord? how fares your majesty?

KING LEAR.

You do me wrong to take me out o'the grave:—
Thou art a soul in bliss; but I am bound
Upon a wheel of fire, that mine own tears
Do scald like molten lead.

CORDELIA.

Sir, do you know me?

KING LEAR.

You are a spirit, I know: when did you die?

CORDELIA.

Still, still, far wide! [4]

DOCTOR.

He's scarce awake: let him alone awhile.

KING LEAR.

Where have I been? Where am I?—Fair daylight?—
I am mightily abused.[5]—I should e'en die with pity,
To see another thus.—I know not what to say.—
I will not swear these are my hands:—let's see;
I feel this pin prick. Would I were assured
Of my condition.

---

[1] **fain:** obliged.
[2] **short:** scanty.
[3] **concluded all:** ended together.
[4] **far wide:** wide of the mark; wandering.
[5] **abused:** deluded.

CORDELIA.

O, look upon me, sir,
And hold your hands in benediction o'er me:—
No, sir, you must not kneel.

KING LEAR.

Pray, do not mock me:
I am a very foolish fond [1] old man,
Fourscore and upward, not an hour more nor less;
And, to deal plainly,[2]
I fear I am not in my perfect mind.
Methinks I should know you, and know this man;
Yet I am doubtful: for I am mainly[3] ignorant
What place this is; and all the skill I have
Remembers not these garments; nor I know not
Where I did lodge last night. Do not laugh at me;
For, as I am a man, I think this lady
To be my child Cordelia.

CORDELIA.

And so I am, I am.

KING LEAR.

Be your tears wet? yes, faith. I pray, weep not:
If you have poison for me, I will drink it.
I know you do not love me; for your sisters
Have, as I do remember, done me wrong:
You have some cause, they have not.

CORDELIA.

No cause, no cause.

KING LEAR.

Am I in France?

EARL OF KENT.

In your own kingdom, sir.

---

[1] **fond**: in his dotage.
[2] **deal plainly**: speak frankly.
[3] **mainly**: entirely.

KING LEAR.

Do not abuse[1] me.

DOCTOR.

Be comforted, good madam: the great rage,[2]
You see, is kill'd in him: and yet it is danger[3]
To make him even o'er the time[4] he has lost.
Desire him to go in; trouble him no more
Till further settling.[5]

CORDELIA.

Will't please your highness walk?

KING LEAR.

You must bear with me:
Pray you now, forget and forgive: I am old and foolish.

[*Exeunt all but* KENT *and* GENTLEMAN.

GENTLEMAN.

Holds it true, sir, that the Duke of Cornwall was so slain?

EARL OF KENT.

Most certain, sir.

GENTLEMAN.

Who is conductor[6] of his people?

EARL OF KENT.

As 'tis said, the bastard son of Gloster.

GENTLEMAN.

They say Edgar, his banisht son, is with the Earl of Kent in Germany.

EARL OF KENT.

Report is changeable. 'Tis time to look about; the powers of the kingdom approach apace.

GENTLEMAN.

The arbitrement[7] is like to be bloody. Fare you well, sir.

[*Exit.*

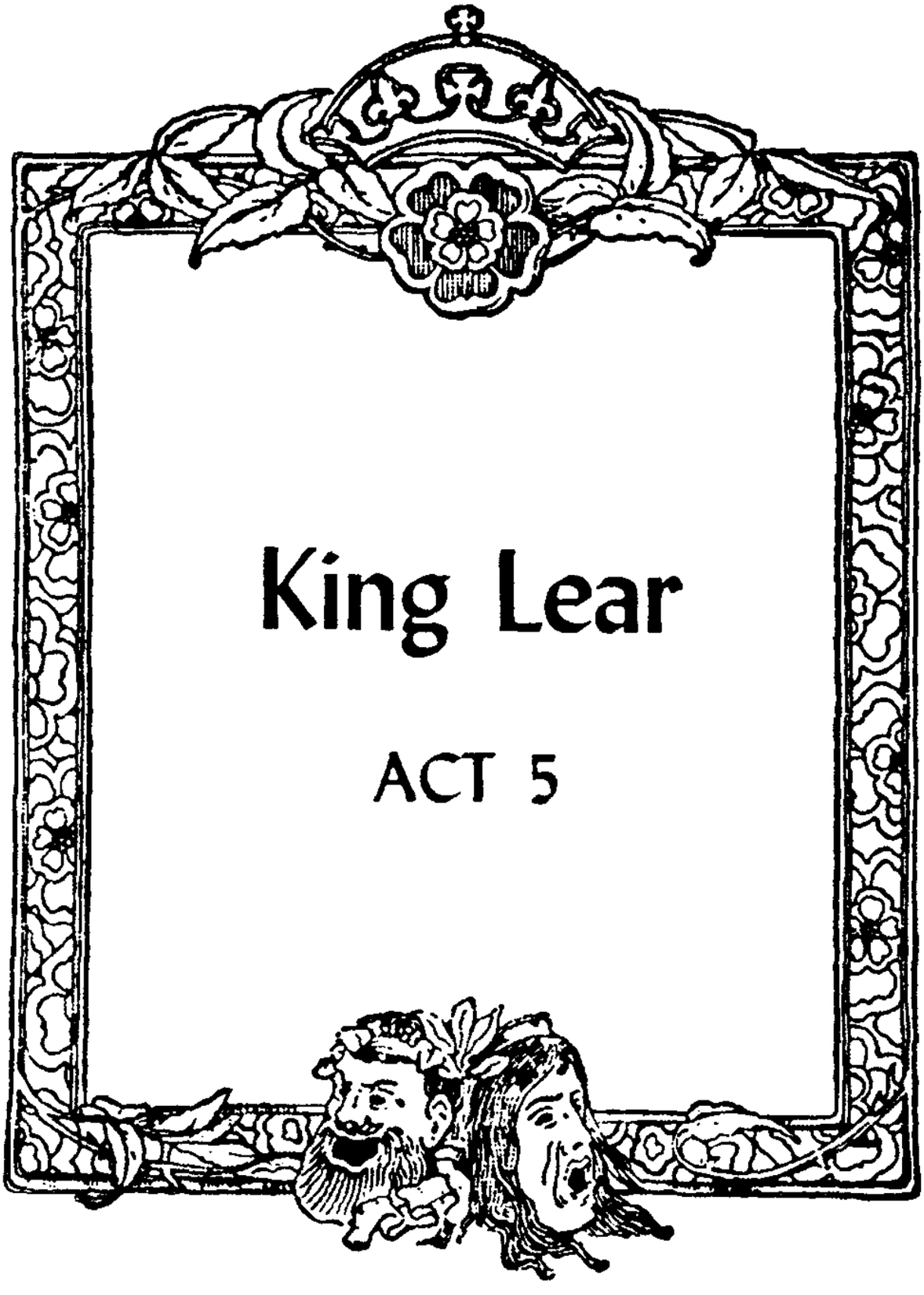
---

[1] **abuse**: deceive. [2] **rage**: frenzy; madness. [3] **danger**: dangerous. [4] **even o'er the time**: catch up on events. [5] **Till further settling**: until he is calmer. [6] **conductor**: leader; general. [7] **arbitrement**: decisive encounter.

EARL OF KENT.

My point and period [1] will be throughly[2] wrought,
Or well or ill, as this day's battle's fought. [*Exit.*

[1] **My point and period**: the end of my chapter.
[2] **throughly**: thoroughly.



King Lear

ACT 5

ACT V

ALBANY decides to fight the French army, which he and Edmund then defeat, but he has learned from Edgar of Goneril's infidelity, and promises to allow Edgar (still in disguise) to challenge Edmund to knightly combat. Lear and Cordelia are led off to prison after the defeat of their army. Edmund gives an order to have Cordelia and Lear killed. Albany exposes the advances of both Regan and Goneril toward Edmund, before Edgar appears as an unnamed challenger, fights Edmund and fatally wounds him. Edgar reveals himself, and tells of the death of Gloucester. The bodies of Regan (poisoned by Goneril) and Goneril (killed by her own hand) are brought in. Then Edmund tells of his order to hang Cordelia and countermands it too late. Lear appears with Cordelia dead in his arms, dies soon after, bending over his beloved daughter. Edgar and Albany are left to rule the kingdom and to bury the dead.

ACT V. SCENE I.

The British camp, near Dover.

Enter, with drum and colours, EDMUND, REGAN, OFFICERS, SOLDIERS, *and others.*

EDMUND.

Know of the duke if his last purpose[1] hold,
Or whether since he is advised by aught
To change the course: he's full of alteration[2]
And self-reproving:—bring his constant pleasure.[3]
[*To an* OFFICER, *who goes out.*

REGAN.

Our sister's man is certainly miscarried.[4]

EDMUND.

'Tis to be doubted,[5] madam.

REGAN.

Now, sweet lord,
You know the goodness I intend upon you:
Tell me,—but truly,—but then speak the truth,
Do you not love my sister?

EDMUND.

In honour'd [6] love.

REGAN.

But have you never found my brother's way
To the forfended [7] place?

---

[1] **last purpose:** last orders. [2] **alteration:** vacillation. [3] **constant pleasure:** fixed decision. [4] **is certainly miscarried:** has surely come to harm (Oswald). [5] **doubted:** feared. [6] **honour'd:** honorable. [7] **forfended:** forbidden.

EDMUND.

That thought abuses you.[1]

REGAN.

I am doubtful that you have been conjunct
And bosom'd with her,[2] as far as we call hers.

EDMUND.

No, by mine honour, madam.

REGAN.

I never shall endure her: dear my lord,
Be not familiar with her.

EDMUND.

Fear me not:—
She and the duke her husband!

Enter, with drum and colours, ALBANY, GONERIL, *and* SOLDIERS.

GONERIL [*aside*].

I had rather lose the battle than that sister
Should loosen him and me.

DUKE OF ALBANY.

Our very loving sister, well be-met.—
Sir, this I hear,—the king is come to his daughter,
With others whom the rigour of our state[3]
Forced to cry out. Where I could not be honest,
I never yet was valiant: for this business,
It toucheth us,[4] as France invades our land,
Not bolds the king, with others, whom, I fear,
Most just and heavy causes make oppose.[5]

EDMUND.

Sir, you speak nobly.

REGAN.

Why is this reason'd?

GONERIL.

Combine together 'gainst the enemy;

---

[1] **abuses you:** does you an injustice. [2] **conjunct/And bosom'd with her:** having intimate relations with her. [3] **rigour of our state:** our harsh rule or government. [4] **It touches us:** it concerns us. [5] **Not . . . oppose:** in other words, we are concerned not because France is siding with King Lear and others who have cause to oppose us, but because he is actually invading our country.

For these domestic and particular broils[1]
Are not the question here.

DUKE OF ALBANY.

Let's, then, determine
With the ancient of war[2] on our proceedings.

EDMUND.

I shall attend you presently at your tent.

REGAN.

Sister, you'll go with us?

GONERIL.

No.

REGAN.

'Tis most convenient;[3] pray you, go with us.

GONERIL [*aside*].

O, ho, I know the riddle.—I will go.

As they are going out, enter EDGAR *disguised.*

EDGAR.

If e'er your Grace had speech with man so poor,
Hear me one word.

DUKE OF ALBANY.

I'll overtake you.—Speak.

[*Exeunt all but* ALBANY *and* EDGAR.

EDGAR.

Before you fight the battle, ope[4] this letter.
If you have victory, let the trumpet sound
For him that brought it: wretched though I seem,
I can produce a champion that will prove
What is avouched there. If you miscarry,[5]
Your business of the world hath so an end,
And machination[6] ceases. Fortune love you!

DUKE OF ALBANY.

Stay till I have read the letter.

---

[1] **broils:** quarrels.
[2] **ancient of war:** experienced army officers.
[3] **convenient:** suitable.
[4] **ope:** open.
[5] **miscarry:** lose the battle.
[6] **machination:** the plot against your life.

EDGAR.

I was forbid it.
When time shall serve, let but the herald cry,
And I'll appear again.

DUKE OF ALBANY.

Why, fare thee well: I will o'erlook[1] thy paper.

[*Exit* EDGAR.

Enter EDMUND.

EDMUND.

The enemy's in view; draw up your powers.[2]
Here is the guess of their true strength and forces
By diligent discovery;—but your haste
Is now urged on you.

DUKE OF ALBANY.

We will greet the time.[3] [*Exit.*

EDMUND.

To both these sisters have I sworn my love;
Each jealous[4] of the other, as the stung
Are of the adder. Which of them shall I take?
Both? one? or neither? Neither can be enjoy'd,
If both remain alive: to take the widow
Exasperates, makes mad her sister Goneril;
And hardly shall I carry out my side,[5]
Her husband being alive. Now, then, we'll use
His countenance[6] for the battle; which being done,
Let her who would be rid of him devise
His speedy taking off. As for the mercy
Which he intends to Lear and to Cordelia,—
The battle done, and they within our power,
Shall never see his pardon; for my state
Stands on me to defend, not to debate.[7] [*Exit*

---

[1] o'erlook: read. [2] powers: troops. [3] greet the time: be ready when the time comes. [4] jealous: *suspicious.* [5] my side: i.e., my side of the bargain. [6] countenance: authority. [7] my state/ Stands on me to defend, not to debate: the time has come for me to act, not to waste time debating moral issues.

SCENE II.

A field between the two camps.

Alarum within. Enter, with drum and colours, LEAR, CORDELIA, *and their* FORCES *over the stage; and exeunt.*

Enter EDGAR *and* GLOSTER.

EDGAR.

Here, father, take the shadow of this tree
For your good host; pray that the right may thrive:
If ever I return to you again,
I'll bring you comfort.

EARL OF GLOSTER.

Grace go with you, sir!

[*Exit* EDGAR.

Alarum and retreat within. Enter EDGAR.

EDGAR.

Away, old man,—give me thy hand,—away!
King Lear hath lost, he and his daughter ta'en:
Give me thy hand; come on.

EARL OF GLOSTER.

No further, sir; a man may rot even here.

EDGAR.

What, in ill thoughts again? Men must endure
Their going hence, even as their coming hither:
Ripeness is all:[1]—come on.

EARL OF GLOSTER.

And that's true too.

[*Exeunt.*

SCENE III.

The British camp, near Dover.

Enter, in conquest, with drum and colours, EDMUND; LEAR *and* CORDELIA *as prisoners;* OFFICERS, SOLDIERS, *&c.*

---

[1] Ripeness is all: all that is important is that we be ready for whatever comes.

EDMUND.

Some officers take them away: good guard,[1]
Until their greater pleasures[2] first be known
That are to censure[3] them.

CORDELIA.

We are not the first
Who, with best meaning,[4] have incurr'd the worst.
For thee, oppressed king, am I cast down;
Myself could else out-frown false fortune's frown.—
Shall we not see these daughters and these sisters?

KING LEAR.

No, no, no, no! Come, let's away to prison:
We two alone will sing like birds i'the cage:
When thou dost ask me blessing, I'll kneel down,
And ask of thee forgiveness: so we'll live,
And pray, and sing, and tell old tales, and laugh
At gilded butterflies,[5] and hear poor rogues[6]
Talk of court news; and we'll talk with them too,—
Who loses and who wins; who's in, who's out;—
And take upon's the mystery of things,[7]
As if we were God's spies: and we'll wear out,
In a wall'd prison, packs and sects[8] of great ones,
That ebb and flow by th'moon.

EDMUND.

Take them away.

KING LEAR.

Upon such sacrifices, my Cordelia,
The gods themselves throw incense. Have I caught thee?[9]

---

[1] **good guard:** guard them well. [2] **their greater pleasures:** the wishes of my superiors. [3] **censure:** judge. [4] **best meaning:** the best of intentions. [5] **gilded butterflies:** courtiers. [6] **rogues:** wretches. [7] **take . . . things:** pretend to understand the mystery of life. [8] **packs and sects:** cliques and parties. [9] **Have I caught thee:** from the second song in Sidney's *Astrophel and Stella.*

He that parts us shall bring a brand [1] from heaven,
And fire us hence like foxes.[2] Wipe thine eyes;
The good-years[3] shall devour them, flesh and fell,[4]
Ere they shall make us weep; we'll see 'em starve first.
Come. [*Exeunt* LEAR *and* CORDELIA, *guarded.*

EDMUND.

Come hither, captain; hark.
Take thou this note [*giving a paper*]; go follow them to prison:
One step I have advanced thee; if thou dost
As this instructs thee, thou dost make thy way
To noble fortunes: know thou this, that men
Are as the time is: to be tender-minded
Does not become a sword:[5]—thy great employment
Will not bear question; either say thou'lt do't,
Or thrive by other means.

OFFICER.

I'll do't, my lord.

EDMUND.

About it; and write happy[6] when thou hast done.
Mark,—I say, instantly; and carry it so[7]
As I have set it down.

OFFICER.

I cannot draw a cart, nor eat dried oats;
If it be man's work, I'll do't. [*Exit.*

Flourish. Enter ALBANY, GONERIL, REGAN, OFFICERS, *and* ATTENDANTS.

DUKE OF ALBANY.

Sir, you have shown to-day your valiant strain,[8]
And fortune led you well: you have the captives
Who were the opposites of this day's strife:

---

[1] **a brand**: fire. [2] **fire us hence like foxes**: drive us out as foxes are smoked from their dens. [3] **good-years**: demons (a word of obscure origin). [4] **fell**: skin. [5] **sword**: *soldier.* [6] **happy**: fortunate. [7] **carry it so**: carry it out. [8] **strain**: blood; heritage.

We do require them of you, so to use them
As we shall find their merits and our safety
May equally determine.

EDMUND.

Sir, I thought it fit
To send the old and miserable king
To some retention and appointed guard;
Whose age has charms in it, whose title more,
To pluck the common bosom[1] on his side,
And turn our imprest lances[2] in our eyes
Which do command them. With him I sent the queen;
My reason all the same; and they are ready
To-morrow, or at further space,[3] t'appear
Where you shall hold your session.[4] At this time
We sweat and bleed: the friend hath lost his friend;
And the best quarrels, in the heat, are cursed
By those that feel their sharpness:—
The question of Cordelia and her father
Requires a fitter place.

DUKE OF ALBANY.

Sir, by your patience,
I hold[5] you but a subject of this war,[6]
Not as a brother.

REGAN.

That's as we list[7] *to grace him.*
Methinks our pleasure might have been demanded,
Ere you had spoke so far. He led our powers;[8]
Bore the commission of my place and person;[9]
The which immediacy may well stand up
And call itself your brother.

---

[1] **To pluck the common bosom:** to win the sympathies of the common people. [2] **imprest lances:** conscripted soldiers. [3] **space:** interval of time. [4] **session:** trial. [5] **hold:** regard. [6] **subject of this war:** i.e., not one in a position to give orders. [7] **list:** please. [8] **powers:** forces. [9] **Bore the commission of my place and person:** acted as my direct representative.

GONERIL.

Not so hot:
In his own grace he doth exalt himself,
More than in your addition.[1]

REGAN.

In my rights
By me invested, he compeers[2] the best.

GONERIL.

That were the most, if he should husband you.

REGAN.

Jesters do oft prove prophets.[3]

GONERIL.

Holla, holla!
That eye that told you so lookt but a-squint.[4]

REGAN.

Lady, I am not well; else I should answer
From a full-flowing stomach.[5]—General,
Take thou my soldiers, prisoners, patrimony;
Dispose of them, of me; the walls are thine:[6]
Witness the world that I create thee here
My lord and master.

GONERIL.

Mean you to enjoy him?

DUKE OF ALBANY.

The let-alone[7] lies not in your good will.

EDMUND.

Nor in thine, lord.

DUKE OF ALBANY.

Half-blooded[8] fellow, yes.

REGAN [*to* EDMUND].

Let the drum strike, and prove my title thine.

DUKE OF ALBANY.

Stay yet; hear reason.—Edmund, I arrest thee

---

[1] **your addition:** the title you have given him. [2] **compeers:** equals. [3] **Jesters do oft prove prophets:** "true words are often spoken in jest." [4] **a-squint:** sideways (lied). [5] **from a full-flowing stomach:** with a torrent of angry words. [6] **the walls are thine:** that is, you have conquered my defenses. [7] **let-alone:** power to prevent it. [8] **Half-blooded:** bastard.

On capital treason;[1] and, in thy arrest,
This gilded serpent [*pointing to* GONERIL].—For your claim, fair sister,
I bar it in the interest of my wife;
'Tis she is sub-contracted[2] to this lord,
And I, her husband, contradict your banns.
If you will marry, make your loves to me;
My lady is bespoke.[3]

GONERIL.

An interlude![4]

DUKE OF ALBANY.

Thou art arm'd, Gloster:—let the trumpet sound:
If none appear to prove upon thy person
Thy heinous, manifest, and many treasons,
There is my pledge [*throwing down a glove*]; I'll prove it on thy heart,
Ere I taste bread, thou art in nothing less
Than I have here proclaim'd thee.

REGAN.

Sick, O, sick!

GONERIL [*aside*].

If not, I'll ne'er trust medicine.[5]

EDMUND.

There's my exchange [*throwing down a glove*]: what in the world he is
That names me traitor, villain-like he lies:[6]
Call by thy trumpet: he that dares approach,
On him, on you, who not? I will maintain[7]
My truth and honour firmly.

DUKE OF ALBANY.

A herald, ho!

EDMUND.

A herald, ho, a herald!

---

[1] ***capital treason:*** *treason for which the penalty is death.* [2] **sub-contracted:** betrothed. [3] **bespoke:** already spoken for. [4] ***An interlude:*** *a nice bit of play-acting (ironic).* [5] **medicine:** poison. [6] **villain-like he lies:** he lies like a villain (a direct challenge). [7] **maintain:** uphold; defend.

DUKE OF ALBANY.

Trust to thy single virtue;[1] for thy soldiers,
All levied in my name, have in my name
Took their discharge.

REGAN.

My sickness grows upon me.

DUKE OF ALBANY.

She is not well; convey her to my tent. [*Exit* REGAN, *led.*

Enter a HERALD.

Come hither, herald,—Let the trumpet sound,—
And read out this.

OFFICER.

Sound, trumpet! [*A trumpet sounds.*

HERALD [*reads*].

If any man of quality or degree[2] within the lists[3] of the army will maintain upon Edmund, supposed Earl of Gloster, that he is a manifold traitor, let him appear by the third sound of the trumpet: he is bold in his defence.

EDMUND.

Sound! [*First trumpet.*

HERALD.

Again! [*Second trumpet.*
Again! [*Third trumpet.*
[*Trumpet answers within.*

Enter EDGAR, *at the third sound, arm'd, a trumpet before him.*

DUKE OF ALBANY.

Ask him his purposes, why he appears
Upon this call o'the trumpet.

HERALD.

What are you?

---

[1] **thy single virtue**: your valour alone (unaided).
[2] **quality or degree**: rank or position.
[3] **lists**: roster.

Your name, your quality? and why you answer
This present summons?

EDGAR.

Know, my name is lost;
By treason's tooth bare-gnawn and canker-bit:[1]
Yet am I noble as the adversary
I come to cope.[2]

DUKE OF ALBANY.

Which is that adversary?

EDGAR.

What's he that speaks for Edmund earl of Gloster?

EDMUND.

Himself:—what say'st thou to him?

EDGAR.

Draw thy sword,
That, if my speech offend a noble heart,
Thy arm may do thee justice: here is mine.
Behold, it is the privilege of mine honours,
My oath, and my profession:[3] I protest,—
Maugre[4] thy strength, youth, place, and eminence,
Despite thy victor sword and fire-new[5] fortune,
Thy valour and thy heart,—thou art a traitor;
False to thy gods, thy brother, and thy father;
Conspirant[6] 'gainst this high illustrious prince;
And, from th'extremest upward of thy head
To the descent and dust below thy foot,
A most toad-spotted traitor. Say thou 'no,'
This sword, this arm, and my best spirits are bent,[7]
To prove upon thy heart, whereto I speak,
Thou liest.

EDMUND.

In wisdom I should ask thy name;
But, since thy outside looks so fair and warlike,

---

[1] **canker-bit:** maggot-eaten. [2] **cope:** encounter in combat. [3] **profession:** that is, as a knight. [4] **Maugre:** in spite of. [5] **fire-new:** brand-new. [6] **Conspirant:** conspiring. [7] **bent:** directed.

And that thy tongue some say[1] of breeding breathes,
What safe and nicely[2] I might well delay
By rule of knighthood, I disdain and spurn:
Back do I toss these treasons to thy head;
With the hell-hated lie o'erwhelm thy heart;
Which,—for they yet glance by, and scarcely bruise,—
This sword of mine shall give them instant way,
Where they shall rest for ever.—Trumpets, speak!

[*Alarums. They fight.* EDMUND *falls.*

DUKE OF ALBANY.

Save him, save him!

GONERIL.

This is practice,[3] Gloster:
By the law of arms thou wast not bound to answer
An unknown opposite; thou art not vanquisht,
But cozen'd and beguiled.[4]

DUKE OF ALBANY.

Shut your mouth, dame,
Or with this paper[5] shall I stop it:—Hold, sir;
Thou worse than any name, read thine own evil:—
No tearing, lady; I perceive you know it.

[*Gives the letter to* EDMUND.

GONERIL.

Say, if I do,[6]—the laws are mine, not thine:
Who can arraign me for't?

DUKE OF ALBANY.

Most monstrous!
Know'st thou this paper?

---

[1] **say**: smack; taste. [2] **nicely**: by observing the niceties (of chivalry). [3] **practice**: treachery. [4] **cozen'd and beguiled**: cheated and deluded. [5] **paper**: letter. [6] **Say, if I do**: suppose I do.

GONERIL.

Ask me not what I know. [*Exit.*

DUKE OF ALBANY.

Go after her: she's desperate; govern her.[1]

[*To an* OFFICER, *who goes out.*

EDMUND.

What you have charged me with, that have I done;
And more, much more; the time will bring it out:
'Tis past, and so am I.—But what art thou
That hast this fortune on me? If thou'rt noble,
I do forgive thee.

EDGAR.

Let's exchange charity.[2]
I am no less in blood than thou art, Edmund;
If more, the more thou hast wrong'd me.
My name is Edgar, and thy father's son.
The gods are just, and of our pleasant vices
Make instruments to plague us:
The dark and vicious place where thee he got[3]
Cost him his eyes.

EDMUND.

Thou hast spoken right, 'tis true;
The wheel[4] is come full circle;[5] I am here.

DUKE OF ALBANY.

Methought thy very gait did prophesy
A royal nobleness:—I must embrace thee:
Let sorrow split my heart, if ever I
Did hate thee or thy father!

EDGAR.

Worthy prince,
I know't.

DUKE OF ALBANY.

Where have you hid yourself?
How have you known the miseries of your father?

---

[1] **govern her**: control her.
[2] **charity**: forgiveness.
[3] **got**: begot.
[4] **wheel**: wheel of fortune.
[5] **full circle**: that is, Edmund's life ends as it began—as an outcast.

EDGAR.

By nursing them, my lord.—List[1] a brief tale;—
And when 'tis told, O, that my heart would burst!—
The bloody proclamation[2] to escape,
That follow'd me so near,—O, our lives' sweetness!
That we the pain of death would hourly die
Rather than die at once!—taught me to shift
Into a madman's rags; t'assume a semblance
That very dogs disdain'd: and in this habit
Met I my father with his bleeding rings,[3]
Their precious stones new lost; became his guide,
Led him, begg'd for him, saved him from despair;
Never—O fault![4]—reveal'd myself unto him,
Until some half-hour past, when I was arm'd;
Not sure, though hoping, of this good success,
I askt his blessing, and from first to last
Told him my pilgrimage: but his flaw'd[5] heart,
Alack, too weak the conflict to support,
'Twixt two extremes of passion, joy and grief,
Burst smilingly.[6]

EDMUND.

This speech of yours hath moved me,
And shall perchance do good: but speak you on;
You look as you had something more to say.

DUKE OF ALBANY.

If there be more, more woeful, hold it in;
For I am almost ready to dissolve,[7]
Hearing of this.

EDGAR.

This would have seem'd a period[8]
To such as love not sorrow; but another,

---

[1] **List:** listen to. [2] **proclamation:** the order for his arrest and death. [3] **rings:** eye sockets without the eyes. [4] **fault:** mistake. [5] **flaw'd:** cracked; damaged. [6] **Burst smilingly:** his overburdened heart failed and he died happy. [7] **dissolve:** dissolve in tears. [8] **a period:** the limit.

To amplify too much, would make much more,
And top extremity.[1]
Whilst I was big[2] in clamour, came there a man,
Who, having seen me in my worst estate,
Shunn'd my abhorr'd society; but then, finding
Who 'twas that so endured, with his strong arms
He fasten'd on my neck, and bellow'd out
As he'ld burst heaven; threw him on my father;
Told the most piteous tale of Lear and him
That ever ear received: which in recounting
His grief grew puissant,[3] and the strings[4] of life
Began to crack: twice then the trumpets sounded,
And there I left him tranced.[5]

DUKE OF ALBANY.

But who was this?

EDGAR.

Kent, sir, the banisht Kent; who in disguise
Follow'd his enemy king,[6] and did him service
Improper for a slave.

Enter a GENTLEMAN *with a bloody knife.*

GENTLEMAN.

Help, help, O, help!

EDGAR.

What kind of help?

DUKE OF ALBANY.

Speak, man.

EDGAR.

What means that bloody knife?

GENTLEMAN.

'Tis hot, it smokes;
It came even from the heart of—O, she's dead!

DUKE OF ALBANY.

Who dead? speak, man.

---

[1] **top extremity:** go beyond the extreme limit.
[2] **big:** loud.
[3] **puissant:** powerful.
[4] **strings:** heartstrings.
[5] **tranced:** in a faint.
[6] **enemy king:** i.e., the king who had denounced him.

GENTLEMAN.

Your lady, sir, your lady: and her sister
By her is poisoned; she hath confest it.

EDMUND.

I was contracted [1] to them both: all three
Now marry in an instant.

EDGAR.

Here comes Kent.

DUKE OF ALBANY.

Produce their bodies, be they alive or dead:—
This judgement of the heavens, that makes us tremble,
Touches us not with pity. [*Exit* GENTLEMAN.

Enter KENT.

O, is this he?
The time will not allow the compliment[2]
Which very[3] manners urges.

EARL OF KENT.

I am come
To bid my king and master aye good night:
Is he not here?

DUKE OF ALBANY.

Great thing of us forgot!—
Speak, Edmund, where's the king? and where's Cordelia?—
[*The bodies of* GONERIL *and* REGAN *are brought in.*
See'st thou this object,[4] Kent?

EARL OF KENT.

Alack, why thus?

EDMUND.

Yet Edmund was beloved:
The one the other poison'd for my sake,

---

[1] **contracted**: betrothed.
[2] **compliment**: ceremony.
[3] **very**: mere.
[4] **object**: sight.

And after slew herself.

DUKE OF ALBANY.

Even so.—Cover their faces.

EDMUND.

I pant for life: some good I mean to do,
Despite of mine own nature. Quickly send—
Be brief in it[1]—to the castle; for my writ
Is on the life of Lear and on Cordelia:—
Nay, send in time.

DUKE OF ALBANY.

Run, run, O, run!

EDGAR.

To who, my lord?—Who hath the office? send
Thy token of reprieve.

EDMUND.

Well thought on: take my sword;
Give it the captain.

DUKE OF ALBANY.

Haste thee, for thy life.

[*Exit* EDGAR.

EDMUND.

He hath commission from thy wife and me
To hang Cordelia in the prison, and
To lay the blame upon her own despair,
That she fordid[2] herself.

DUKE OF ALBANY.

The gods defend her!—Bear him hence awhile.

[EDMUND *is borne off.*

Enter LEAR, *with* CORDELIA *dead in his arms;* EDGAR, OFFICER, *and others.*

KING LEAR.

Howl, howl, howl, howl!—O, you are men of stone:[3]
Had I your tongues and eyes, I'ld use them so

---

[1] **Be brief in it:** be quick about it.
[2] **fordid:** destroyed.
[3] **stone:** glass; a mirror of polished stone.

That heaven's vault should crack.—She's gone for ever!—
I know when one is dead, and when one lives;
She's dead as earth.—Lend me a looking-glass;
If that her breath will mist or stain the stone,[1]
Why, then she lives.

EARL OF KENT.

Is this the promised end? [2]

EDGAR.

Or image of that horror?

DUKE OF ALBANY.

Fall, and cease! [3]

KING LEAR.

This feather stirs; she lives! if it be so,
It is a chance which does redeem all sorrows
That ever I have felt.

EARL OF KENT.

O my good master! [*Kneeling.*

KING LEAR.

Prithee, away.

EDGAR.

'Tis noble Kent, your friend.

KING LEAR.

A plague upon you, murderers, traitors all!
I might have saved her; now she's gone for ever!—
Cordelia, Cordelia! stay a little. Ha!
What is't thou say'st?—Her voice was ever soft,
Gentle, and low,—an excellent thing in woman.—
I kill'd the slave that was a-hanging thee.

OFFICER.

'Tis true, my lords, he did.

KING LEAR.

Did I not, fellow?

---

[1] **stone:** mirror.
[2] **promised end:** Day of Judgment.
[3] **Fall and cease:** let the heavens fall and the world come to an end.

I have seen the day, with my good biting falchion[1]
I would have made them skip: I am old now,
And these same crosses[2] spoil me.—Who are you?
Mine eyes are not o'the best:—I'll tell you straight.

EARL OF KENT.

If fortune brag of two she loved and hated,
One of them we behold.

KING LEAR.

This is a dull sight. Are you not Kent?

EARL OF KENT.

The same,
Your servant Kent.—Where is your servant Caius?

KING LEAR.

He's a good fellow, I can tell you that;
He'll strike, and quickly too:—he's dead and rotten.

EARL OF KENT.

No, my good lord; I am the very man,—

KING LEAR.

I'll see that straight.[3]

EARL OF KENT.

That, from your first[4] of difference and decay,[5]
Have follow'd your sad steps.

KING LEAR.

You are welcome hither.

EARL OF KENT.

Nor no man else:—all's cheerless, dark, and deadly.—
Your eldest daughters have fordone[6] themselves,
And desperately are dead.

KING LEAR.

Ay, so I think.

---

[1] **falchion**: curved sword. [2] **crosses**: troubles. [3] **I'll see that straight**: I'll look into that in a moment. [4] **first**: first day. [5] **difference and decay**: the change in your circumstances (declining fortunes). [6] **fordone**: destroyed.

DUKE OF ALBANY.

He knows not what he says; and vain is it[1]
That we present us to him.

EDGAR.

Very bootless.[2]

Enter an OFFICER.

OFFICER.

Edmund is dead, my lord.

DUKE OF ALBANY.

That's but a trifle here.—
You lords and noble friends, know our intent.
What comfort to this great decay[3] may come
Shall be applied: for us, we will resign,
During the life of this old majesty,
To him our absolute power:—[*to* EDGAR *and* KENT] you, to your rights;
With boot,[4] and such addition[5] as your honours
Have more than merited.—All friends shall taste
The wages of their virtue, and all foes
The cup of their deservings.—O, see, see!

KING LEAR.

And my poor fool[6] is hang'd! No, no, no life!
Why should a dog, a horse, a rat, have life,
And thou no breath at all? Thou'lt come no more,
Never, never, never, never, never!—
Pray you, undo this button:[7]—thank you, sir.—
Do you see this? Look on her,—look, her lips,—
Look there, look there!— [*Dies.*

EDGAR.

He faints!—My lord, my lord!—

EARL OF KENT.

Break, heart; I prithee, break!

---

[1] **vain is it:** it is in vain. [2] **bootless:** useless. [3] **great decay:** King Lear. [4] **boot:** with other advantages to boot. [5] **addition:** *titles.* [6] **fool:** an endearing term for Cordelia. [7] **undo this button:** Lear is gasping for breath.

EDGAR.

Look up, my lord.

EARL OF KENT.

Vex not his ghost: O, let him pass! he hates him
That would upon the rack[1] of this tough world
Stretch him out longer.

EDGAR.

He is gone indeed.

EARL OF KENT.

The wonder is, he hath endured so long:
He but usurpt his life.[2]

DUKE OF ALBANY.

Bear them from hence.—Our present business
Is general woe.—[*to* KENT *and* EDGAR] Friends of my soul, you twain
Rule in this realm, and the gored[3] state sustain.

EARL OF KENT.

I have a journey, sir, shortly to go;
My master calls me,[4]—I must not say no.

EDGAR.

The weight of this sad time we must obey;
Speak what we feel, not what we ought to say.
The oldest hath borne most: we that are young
Shall never see so much, nor live so long.

[*Exeunt, with a dead march.*

---

[1] **rack**: rack of torture.

[2] **usurpt his life**: that is, he extended his life beyond the normal span of years.

[3] **gored**: wounded.

[4] **calls me**: i.e., calls me to follow him into death.

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